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TWIXT HAMMER AND ANVIL.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY E. J. FRANCIS AND CO.,
TOOK'S COURT AND WINE OFFICE COURT, E.C.

'TWIXT HAMMER AND ANVIL.

A Novel.

BY

FRANK LEE BENEDICT,

AUTHOR OF
'MISS DOROTHY'S CHARGE,' 'MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR,'
'ST. SIMON'S NIECE,' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY,
10 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1876.

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TO

CLEMENT GODSON, Esq., M.D.,

WITH THE SINCERE REGARDS OF

FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

London, December, 1875.

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'TWIXT HAMMER AND ANVIL.

CHAPTER I.

HER ARRIVAL.

It was after sunset when they reached the station.

Honour Pemberton helped her cousin to descend from the railway-carriage — a work requiring time and patience, as Mrs. Somers was always beset by sundry small fears on such occasions. She had a troublesome habit of resting one foot on the step and waving the other wildly in the air, as if beginning some eccentric and improper dance, while she uttered faint moans and dismal assurances that the moment for the breaking of her poor neck had at last arrived.

But Honour was too much accustomed to these demonstrations to be annoyed by them, and to-night there was nobody to look on and

laugh, for the guards were too busy shouting and rushing up and down to notice the performance, and the two ladies were the only passengers who alighted.

Mrs. Somers was safe on the platform at length, her senses sufficiently restored, so that she could utter a croak of contentment. The descent had been attended with more than ordinary difficulty, owing to the fact of the worthy old soul's being fast asleep when the train halted, and unable, for some moments, to persuade herself to waken.

"I do believe I was dozing," she said; "I am really surprised, for I hardly ever shut my eyes on a journey. If one does happen to nod, that is the very time they choose to stop—I wonder why!"

Mrs. Somers passed her life in a chronic state of wonder and astonishment over something. If there was no matter of moment to cause the sensation, she could be surprised at finding it morning instead of night, at hearing a thrush sing in June, or having green peas in midsummer.

The engine shrieked hoarsely, and the express dashed on as if enraged at the brief delay, and desiring to show its contempt for the little station.

Honour led her relative into the waiting-room; but before she could ask any questions of the old Norman official, who reigned there with a nose so red that it looked like a signal-light, one of the servants she had sent down from Paris a few days previous hurried toward her.

Mrs. Pemberton spoke kindly to the man, then looked about as if in expectation of seeing some other person present to welcome her.

"If Madame pleases," said Pierre, "Monsieur de Vieuxville would undoubtedly have done himself the pleasure to meet Madame; but only this morning he was called away on business—on business of importance," Pierre added, with an air of profound wisdom, which would have set well on the face of a Lord Chancellor.

Human nature is full of inconsistencies. Honour felt annoyed at the absence of her unknown business-manager, although she probably would not have confessed the feeling even to herself.

They had a drive of perhaps half a mile along a level road, then came a steep ascent, and they entered a quaint Norman village, whose principal street owned a pavement of round stones, which would have caused the heart of a philanthropist to ache when he

thought of the beasts and human unfortunates forced daily to traverse it.

The carriage came to a halt in the broad, irregular square. Pierre leaped down from his seat beside the coachman, and informed his mistress that it would be necessary to light the lamps, as it would take nearly an hour to reach the château, and a portion of the road led through a wood. Madame, however, need have no fear of the darkness, because he, Pierre, was at hand, always ready to die in her service, if need be.

Madame dismissed him with an absent smile, and sat looking out across the square, picturesque enough in its way. On one side a café, in front of which was grouped at least half the male population of the place, whose cider-drinking and domino-playing had been interrupted, in order to stare at the carriage and speculate as to which of its occupants might be the new proprietor of the sugar factory. A row of odd, peaked-roofed houses; knots of women in tall Normandy bonnets knitting and gossiping in the doorways; groups of preternaturally solemn children playing about the fountain in the centre of the *place*, where an old crone, belated in her work, was washing some weeds for her evening salad,

too busy cursing the youngsters for approaching her to vouchsafe any notice, beyond a malignant frown, of the handsome equipage and its owner. Honour remarked her, for a last ray of red light shone across her short blue petticoats and conical cap, bringing her out in as strong relief as if she had been a pre-Raphaelite picture, and, besides the artistic effect, she dashed her bunch of weeds up and down with such vengeful force, and swore with such energy, that she seemed the one really animated object in the whole scene.

At the further end of the square rose an ancient greystone church, with a heavy Norman tower, across whose top the red gleams wove a sort of crown, though the front lay in deep shadow. The bell was swinging slowly to and fro, with a dreary muffled sound, as if it had never rung to chronicle anything pleasanter than death or disaster. A few women came forth one after another from under the arched doorway; a stray priest went shuffling along like some crooked-legged bird. The church was a fine specimen of architecture; Honour remembered reading that it was famous for a marvellous painted window, which had been the gift of a French princess away back in the days of the Crusades.

She opened the carriage-door herself while Pierre had flown off to the café in search of matches, and descended with a few explanatory words to her companion, which that lady neither heeded nor heard.

Honour crossed the square and entered the church; the service was over; a candle or two still burned on a side altar, but the chancel was quite dark, and the great east window might have been a black curtain for any brilliancy it possessed.

Mrs. Pemberton stood for a few moments, shivering, oppressed by the gloom; wondering in an absent way why she had come in—why she had come down to this part of the world, in fact. There was nothing for her to do; the business had always gone on well enough, and would probably continue to; at all events, her presence could effect no good. The fine schemes of activity and having some potent object of interest with which she had pleased herself during the past weeks, appeared girlish and nonsensical just now.

She walked slowly out of the church. The last gleam of sunset had faded, and the square was dark and solemn. The cider-drinkers had entered the café; the children had disappeared, even the savage old woman

had taken her salad and her curses out of sight.

The landscape which stretched below the village to the left looked cold and dismal, however bravely it might by sunlight uphold its vaunted claims to beauty. The sky was grey and lowering; a few stars trembled here and there among the clouds, only adding to the cheerlessness of the scene, and the wind rose suddenly, chill and searching.

"I wish I had stayed in Italy," thought Honour, as she moved back to the carriage. "Normandy may be as picturesque as the guide-books please, but May is too early to enjoy it."

Pierre was waiting to greet her with salaams almost as profound as if she had been an eastern queen.

Madame had been condescending enough to visit the church—ah, a grand old church!

"What is its name?" Honour asked.

"St. Clotilde, if Madame pleased."

Madame could have taken her oath that Clotilde was the most disagreeable and overrated saint in the calendar!

"How many inhabitants has Sainton?" she asked. Why she could not have told, unless for the satisfaction of thinking the number too

many or few, or indulging in some similar vagary, less common to her than to most of us.

"Pardon—the station was called Sainton; but the village had another name! As for the population——"

"What is the village called, then?" his mistress inquired, ruthlessly interrupting a speech which he meant to be sufficiently long to make amends for the fact that he could give no information whatever in reply to her question.

"Vieuxville, Madame."

Honour positively frowned. She leaned back in her seat and said, "Drive on—drive fast—it is cold."

Only a mile or so beyond the station they entered the wood of which Pierre had spoken—the darkest and dreariest in France, Honour felt certain. She wrapped the carriage rug carefully about her slumbering companion, and shivered through all her wraps; but the chill did not come from the evening air, keen as it was. The cold began away down in her soul, and the low complaint of the wind only seemed a response to the spirit voices which shook the very depths of her being with their dismal prophecies—as dismal and persistent as they were vague and unreasonable. A presentiment beset her that she was going forward to

trouble and pain, though it was not easy to imagine how either unpleasant visitor could assail her in the quiet retreat where she proposed to spend the next few months.

They were out of the wood at last. Honour had begun to believe that she had been carried into the depths of an enchanted forest, where she must wander for ever unless the real prince came to extricate her. At this latter thought Honour gave herself up as utterly idiotic! Her brains certainly must have become a mere pulp, when she could dream of applying the pretty old dream legend to her life. She who had never, even in her earliest youth, encountered a gleam of romance, and who, if she believed in love as an abstract theory, knew it was about as probable that Mrs. Somers should suddenly exchange her wrinkles of sixty for the freshness of sixteen, as that she, Honour Pemberton, should ever hear the voice of the magician who maketh old things new, and leads those whom he summons into the glory of a higher sphere than common mortals tread.

Away the carriage swept down a steep hill. It was too dark to distinguish more than that there were fields and farm-houses on either side; heavy masses rising in the distance, which must

be châteaux or large country houses. Then came a line of level road; then a roar like smothered thunder; then three or four great jets of flame leaping into the air; and Pierre leaned back in his perch to say, "The sugar factory, Madame."

On they flew past the knots of workmen's houses—past a little hamlet, whose white cottages gleamed through the dusk—then a hill—to the right a high wall, above which rose a dense wood. They were on the top. They reached a pair of great iron gates, just within which stood a lodge. A woman came out at the noise of the wheels, opened the gates, and uttered a voluble welcome to the new mistress, of which not a word was audible to the person addressed.

There was a long, winding avenue to ascend, then they came out on a wide sweep of gravel, and the front of the old château rose dark and frowning—here and there a faint light from scattered casements adding to the immensity and the gloominess of the whole.

The coachman cracked his whip till it sounded like the report of a twelve-barrelled American revolver, and Pierre, faithful still to his duty, in spite of his cold feet, shouted,—

"Vieuxville, Madame!"

Once more that strange warning crept like an icy wind across Honour's soul, but she had no leisure even to rail anew at her own folly. The outer doors of the house had opened—a broad river of light streamed from the entrance hall and illuminated the stone perron and terraces. Several servants appeared. Mrs. Somers woke so bewildered, that the first thing was to soothe her back to sanity; and between this task and the enthusiastic greetings of the domestics, Honour found her arrival a very commonplace affair, in spite of her presentiments and fears.

Presently she discovered that she was up in the chamber which had been appropriated to Mrs. Somers, and was aiding Céline to get her relative into bed, the old lady preferring a cup of tea and her pillows to all the attractions of the dinner, which Céline averred had been prepared on the probability of their coming.

Céline was Honour's maid, sent down three days before along with the new servants, because she was a sensible creature, and could be trusted to have matters prepared according to her mistress's liking. Just after she had gone, Mrs. Somers thought it a favourable opportunity to indulge in illness, and as she had been obliged some time before to discharge

her own woman, the care of her had fallen entirely upon Honour.

Once Mrs. Somers safe in bed, and her tea served by the good-natured-looking Norman whom Céline had already unearthed to serve as her special attendant, Honour was free to think about herself, and Céline insisted on her thinking about the dinner.

"The rooms Madame chose are among the prettiest in the whole house—it is a prodigious old barrack," Céline said, as she conducted her mistress down the gallery.

A plan of the château had been sent to Honour in Paris, and she had portioned off the apartments to suit her fancy, forwarding such new articles as she found necessary for the moment, and deciding to wait to see what the house already contained before choosing the rest, having a hope that, as it was a real château, she might find all sorts of charming rooms and ancient furniture, with which she should wish her improvements to be in keeping.

Céline opened a door that gave entrance to an ante-room, beyond which was an octagon-shaped boudoir, and still beyond a bed-chamber, almost circular in form. Fires burned cheerfully on the hearths; bright carpets had been

laid down; and altogether Céline had managed to make the apartments look very home-like and comfortable, while the shape of the rooms and sundry old *meubles*, dating back to the days when Francis I. had occupied this very suite of chambers, added a certain picturesqueness exceedingly agreeable to Honour.

"*Voilà*, Madame!" cried the waiting woman, with a little air of triumph.

"It all looks as pretty as possible; thanks, Cyline," returned her mistress; and Céline was amply repaid for her trouble just by those words and the smile which accompanied them.

Honour was inclined to follow her cousin's example, and have tea upstairs, but Céline demurred at this. The *chef* would be disappointed; a choice little dinner had been prepared. There was a certain dish of fish—*un vrai plat Normand*—which Madame ought to taste. It would give a dead man an appetite, Céline vowed, and the little *gourmande's* mouth watered at the bare idea of its savouriness.

To distress Céline and outrage the sensitive feelings of the *chef* was an enormity of which Honour, tired as she was, could not be guilty, so she submitted to the inevitable with a tolerable grace. The necessary change of dress

completed, Céline pronounced her charming, and hurried her away.

Honour descended the great oak staircase, wide enough for a large family to have walked abreast, with a carved balustrade which was a miracle of art, and reached the entrance-hall—a spacious square room, hung with old portraits and decorated with suits of armour, and possessing a quaint clock like a tower, which struck seven as Honour stopped to regard it, while from a suddenly opening door toward the top a procession of tiny figures appeared and made stately obeisances, as if they had come out to do homage to the new mistress of the mansion.

Pierre was waiting there; he paused to bestow one wrathful glance upon Céline, mentally accusing her of a desire to interfere with his duties and rights, then rushed on to fling open the double doors into the dining-room as widely as if Honour, instead of being one slender woman, guiltless of crinoline, had been six portly dowagers all wearing court trains and hoops more prodigious than those of Madame de Pompadour's time.

Dining in solitary state is never an enlivening occupation, nor is it conducive to appetite; but Honour did her best to appear to eat, and

she especially praised the *plat Normand*, which she found it impossible to touch on any terms.

Luckily, a beautiful Angora cat, as large as a spaniel and as white as virgin purity, sailed majestically in at this juncture, and walked up to the table to make acquaintance—uttered one miaul of greeting, and then, scenting the odour of the fish, began licking his whiskers with an air of *convoitise* which gave him an odd resemblance to Céline's expression of countenance while expatiating on the merits of the *plat*.

Honour learned from Pierre that this dignified creature exulted in the name of Sultan, and she won Sultan's heart at once and for ever by bestowing a liberal allowance of the fish upon him, which he consumed in as dainty, relishing a fashion as if he had been the Duc de Richelieu transformed into a grimalkin.

The dining-room was a fine apartment—rather too sparsely supplied with furniture that dated back to the Renaissance—at the farther end a wonderful buffet, which was evidently much older, and so marvellously carved that, as she rose from table, Honour crossed the room to inspect it.

If Madame pleased, it came from Italy, said the voice of the omnipresent Pierre, close behind her. It was the work of a great Floren-

tine artist, and had been a gift to one of the Marquises de Vieuxville from no less a personage than Catherine de Medicis.

Pierre offered these statements in an awe-stricken tone, trying to look as much as might be like an old family servant of the ancient race he mentioned.

But his mistress turned abruptly away; she was still tired and capricious enough for that name to irritate her anew. Pierre, with a look of injured feeling on his face, threw open the doors which led into a still larger room at the front of the house. "The library, Madame," he said in a mournful tone, completely lost on the lady he addressed. "Will Madame enter, or shall I take Madame's coffee up to the drawing-rooms?"

"I will sit here," Honour replied; "but I will not have coffee—bring me some tea in about half an hour."

Pierre closed the folding leaves behind her with a bow positively overwhelming in its mingled respectfulness and reproach, and hastened back to the table to soothe his feelings with a surreptitious glass of Burgundy. Sultan stalked beside his new friend, his long silky tail floating out like a banner; but he, too, looked pained, even disgusted, when he per-

ceived that Honour chose to march up and down the room instead of sitting quiet by the fire to aid the work of digestion. He trotted away to the great chimney — so large that whole logs of wood were blazing in it—and stretched himself on the Persian rug in front of the hearth to meditate in peace.

After a while Honour ceased her promenade, and claimed a share of the rug, which Sultan accorded with a graciousness that would have astonished those who knew him most intimately. She seated herself in a low easy-chair, and fell to thinking so profoundly, that even Pierre's entrance with the tea-tray did not rouse her, and she sat there so long oblivious, that the beverage must have had time to grow cold. The door opened again. Pierre's painfully soft voice demanded if it would be convenient for Madame to receive Monsieur Armand de Vieuxville.

"Monsieur Armand," was her rapid thought. "I never heard of him—he must be a relative of the old man." Then she said aloud, "Yes, show Monsieur in."

Pierre disappeared. During her moment of solitude Honour had leisure to indulge in another swift meditation.

"I dare say he will be as odious as his uncle

—or whatever relation he may be to the ancient *roué*. I cannot see why he should come—at least he is not the director. I suppose the other sent him to excuse his own rudeness in not taking the trouble to go to the station to welcome me. A mere boy, probably—all boys are tiresome enough, but French boys are intolerable."

The door had opened without her hearing it. A step on the carpet roused her so suddenly that she was positively startled. She glanced up, and saw, neither a youth nor an old man—a gentleman who might have been eight-and-twenty, and one of the most elegant-looking men she had ever seen. Honour was not easily confused, but the difference between the person she had expected and this apparition did for an instant shake even her trained composure. However, she rose, bowed graciously, and said —not quite knowing what she said, and certainly not meaning to say what she did,—

"It is Monsieur Armand de Vieuxville?'

"And the director of Madame Pemberton's sugar factories," he answered, with a courteous bow.

CHAPTER II.

HIS BLUNDER.

HONOUR knew that she sank slowly into her seat again, that she motioned the visitor toward a chair; but for a few seconds she did not realize much else. She was positively stupefied with surprise.

He stood resting his hand on the back of the chair he had drawn to the fire in obedience to her gesture. She heard him expressing polite hopes that the journey had not been fatiguing; but the first tangible thought which struggled up from under her stupor of astonishment was, that never in her life had she listened to a man's voice at once so sweet and so cold.

Some way the tone of that voice brought back her self-possession, and with it a feeling of keen vexation at having lost her composure. Nothing more missish and silly than her behaviour could be conceived. Really, a girl of fifteen just escaping the misery of short

dresses could not have shown less *savoir faire.* Honour gave herself many sharp mental raps in rapid succession while her guest was uttering his courteous remarks in that subdued monotone, as deep and rich as the under-notes of an organ.

"I had hoped to see your relative," Monsieur de Vieuxville was saying, when she could listen understandingly to his words.

"I am sorry, but she cannot come down this evening; she is suffering from the effects of a sick headache," Honour answered.

"I trust a night's sleep will restore her," Monsieur said. "Perhaps to-morrow she will be able to receive me?"

Good heavens, was she to hate him worse than she would have detested the worn, *blasé*, wicked old man she had thought to find! He hoped her cousin would be able to receive him on the morrow! Did he mean to begin acquaintance by insinuating that his French ideas of decorum were shocked because she received his visit unsupported by an elderly chaperon!

"I have no doubt that, at least in a few days, she will be well enough to see you," was, of course, all she said.

"I was very sorry not to have been at the

station to meet your relative—and yourself." (I put the dash, because it seemed to Honour that he made a pause, though she could not be certain.) "I was called away directly after breakfast on matters connected with Madame Pemberton's affairs, and have only just returned."

"As we had set no time for our arrival, of course we had to run the risk of finding the way to our destination unaided."

Looking up as she spoke, Honour fancied she caught the gleam of an amused smile playing about Monsieur's mouth, under the long, drooping moustache which shadowed it. Had he believed that he detected *pique* in her remark? Was his masculine vanity gratified by what he considered an exhibition of feminine weakness? But if the smile had been visible, it was gone in a flash, and the glance which met hers was grave as ever.

"I suppose it is too soon to ask if you think yourselves likely to be comfortable in your new quarters?" he said, after a brief pause.

"So far, at least, everything looks sufficiently promising," she replied, trying hard to make her voice sound easy and conversational, but fearful that she did not succeed over well.

"And that is as much as you could be

expected to say," returned he, with his provokingly calm manner — at least provoking to her just now, though she could not help confessing that at a cooler moment, and where another man was concerned, she should ten to one have pronounced it the perfection of elegant breeding—self-possessed, yet with a certain deference in every look or word, which so many men of the present generation seem utterly to have forgotten, if, indeed, the feeling was ever known to them.

"Madame has—I do not know if she be your aunt or your sister," he interrupted the beginning of his sentence to add, and waiting quietly for her to solve his uncertainty.

"My cousin, or, to be quite exact, my cousin twice removed," replied Honour, her precision, perhaps, implying, if he chose to view the matter in such a light, that she was giving a reproof in her turn *à propos* to his curiosity.

"Ah! yes, your cousin. Has she a fancy for business details, and a knowledge of them?"

"Neither fancy nor knowledge," returned Honour, wondering what on earth he meant to reach with his inquiries.

She stooped to caress Sultan, who had just wakened from his nap, and stood looking from

one to the other with an air of impenetrable wisdom. Sultan allowed her to stroke his back twice; then, as she was inviting his majesty to mount into her lap, he whisked away to Monsieur de Vieuxville, climbed on his knee, and began exhibiting demonstrations of affection more like those a dog would show than an ordinary cat.

"Sultan and I are old friends," observed Monsieur, with a smile, as if apologizing for the animal's rudeness. Honour thought there was a certain triumph visible in both smile and words. He was exactly the sort of man to be fond of victory, however trifling!

Probably she would have been still more vexed could she have read Monsieur de Vieuxville's thoughts. He was presuming to think, in a cool, *dilettante* fashion, that she was worth looking at. He had been struck by the picture as he entered, and saw her leaning back in the low chair.

Honour Pemberton was five-and-twenty; one is still very young at that age; but, as a rule, Honour's face had no trace of girlishness left in it, youthful as it looked. There were times when, owing to some peculiar dress or her having colour in her usually pale cheeks, or some passing mood, that she appeared

younger by several years than she really was —to-night chanced to be one of those occasions.

When he first saw her, leaning her head back against the cushions of her chair with her hands idly folded across her knee, Monsieur de Vieuxville had fancied her about nineteen or twenty, and to Monsieur that era appeared mere girlhood.

Honour was not positively a handsome woman, but Nature had taken more pains with each separate detail of her countenance than she often does in the case of absolute beauty. Her complexion was pale rather than fair, but exquisitely delicate and smooth. The mouth was perfect, except for a shade of sadness, which vanished when she smiled. Her eyes were beautiful, too—a clear grey, but in moments of excitement the pupils had a trick of dilating until the orbs looked black.

Her head was a little large, though admirably shaped; her forehead broad and too high; but she wore her hair in short frizzed masses over it, thereby somewhat injuring the oval, while it softened the expression of her face.

"Does Madame Pemberton intend to spend the entire summer here?" he asked presently.

"I cannot tell how long we may stop," Honour answered, remembering too vividly still her doleful fancies during the drive from the station to think that her residence in the new home would be a long one.

"Are you fond of the country?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. Honour revelled in country life, and adored nature with the soul of a painter, but she had no mind to be demonstrative or enthusiastic in this presence.

"Young ladies usually do if they find plenty of amusements—gay society, drives, picnics, and so on," returned he, with a slightly satirical smile.

Honour regarded that ranking her probable ideas among those to be expected from girls in their teens a horrible impertinence, and, indeed, considering their relations as employer and paid servitor, it certainly did appear in the light of a liberty.

"I do not know much about young ladies' tastes," she said, coldly.

"I suppose you like to dance?" he continued.

Positively he was trying to get his intellect down to some sufficiently frivolous topic to have suited a child! Honour's finger tips tingled anew.

"I think I used," she replied.

Again she was sure he repressed a smile.

"I suppose, like your cousin, you are an American?" he said.

"Yes"—only another monosyllable.

"And American young ladies bear the reputation of being even fonder of gaieties than the demoiselles of other countries."

This speech was not calculated to rouse anger—it only made her begin to wonder if the man were a little mad.

"They are said, however, as a rule, to relinquish such fondness once married—an abnegation the women of few other lands can claim," she replied, unable to resist this thrust at his *compatriotes*, even though he might be astray in his intellects.

"Yes; I have often heard that said," returned he. "Well, you will find this neighbourhood quite gay if you remain with your cousin until summer."

Remain with her cousin? What did he mean?

"Have you been long in Europe?" he asked. She had been too busy with her perplexed mental questionings to answer his last remark.

"Four years," she replied.

"And now Madame Pemberton at least has

an additional inducement for staying here since this new property has fallen to her."

"Naturally," said Honour.

"I suppose you would hardly fancy the idea of completely expatriating yourself?" he continued.

"I like my country," she answered.

"So many of you American young ladies have consented to accept ties which bind them here," said he, with a return of that ironical smile. "I was amused the other day with an article in some paper; an anonymous correspondent was lamenting the fact that the Yankee girls were taking possession of all the eligible titles in France and Italy."

Mad or not, while this man remained the manager of her business, it was the last time she would ever overlook such conversation, such a superior, condescending manner—the manner of a man no longer young, to a chit of a girl—as he had presumed on this occasion to indulge in.

"I believe one reason for Madame Pemberton's staying in Europe so long has been her health," Monsieur continued, still with that air of trying to be amiable to a very young lady. ,,She suffered a great deal from bronchitis

owing to the sharp sea air of New York, she wrote me, when asking about this climate."

"I have suffered from it," she said.

"Ah, you also?" he asked, in a tone of surprise.

A sudden suspicion flashed across Honour's mind—a suspicion which in the case of another man would have immensely tickled her sense of humour; but her previous prejudices against Monsieur de Vieuxville had been so augmented by her irritation of the last half-hour, that she felt vexed instead of amused.

"You have also suffered from that dreadful malady?" he repeated.

"I think I do not quite understand what you mean by 'also,'" she said.

"*Comme Madame*—as well as Madame Pemberton," he added, in English, with a faultless accent too, as if he thought she had missed the sense of the French phrase.

"Are you not aware that I am Madame Pemberton?" she inquired, in his native tongue.

He looked so shocked, so utterly horrified, that her annoyance vanished.

"I have to beg you a thousand pardons!" he said. "I have been guilty of a most stupid, unforgivable blunder. I mistook you for a young lady relative of Madame—of——"

"Of myself," she added, as he hesitated, and then began to laugh. "Pray do not be annoyed. I only just now discovered your mistake."

But he looked distressed still.

"You must have thought me very rude," he continued. "As I caught the first sight of you, I fancied you were very young and—and——"

"You did your best to find conversation suited to my years," she went on, when he broke down again. "It was very good of you—but how hard you had to work, and I, not knowing what was the matter, could not help you."

Her tone was perfectly friendly now, and she laughed so pleasantly that he could not resist the infection, and laughed too, thereby recovering his self-possession.

"I am not accustomed to young girls, and am a little afraid of them," he said, "so was quite at a loss what topic to choose."

"Yes—that was evident. 'Do I like picnics?' You might have lengthened the topic by adding that the caterpillars which crawl down one's back on such occasions are rather a nuisance," laughed she.

"I was too stupid even to think of that!"

"Am I fond of dancing?" pursued she, half

inspired by the fun of the situation, half with a malicious desire to tease him. "I had three minds to say I did not know how. I am sure you would have offered to find me a master."

"Ah, Madame, you are too hard on me!" he pleaded, though again he joined in her merriment.

"And the demoiselles of my country who are so insane for amusement! I suppose you expected each moment to hear me ask you to waltz."

"After all," said he, "it is not my fault—you do look so very young——"

"Ah, ah!" she interrupted. "Please remember you have discovered I am not sweet sixteen! A woman near thirty is not young."

Honour was fond of talking as if her twenty-five years required several more added to them to express her real age.

"Besides, I had the idea that I was to meet a lady of forty-five or so."

"A warning against having preconceived ideas."

"It was a little the fault of your servant, too," he continued. "I asked if Madame Pemberton was visible—he said the young lady was in the library; so I thought I would come

in to make inquiries of you as to the health of your relative."

"I recollect now that Pierre spoke to me of my cousin by that name. I forgot to tell him that she did not share mine," returned Honour.

"Then I may hope to be forgiven?" he asked.

"There is nothing to forgive," she replied, amiably.

All the same she was thinking that she did not like this man, and never should. She had detested him in advance as an old *roué*—a broken-down spendthrift. She remembered that, though she found him still young, the stories in regard to his life held good, and Honour shrank from any form of profligacy with an abhorrence which many good, even delicate-minded, women do not appear to feel. It is a mournful fact—but it is one, nevertheless—that for a man to have the reputation of being wild, of wasting money, of trifling with the peace of women, of endangering the happiness and honour of husbands, renders him, with many of the opposite sex, an object of interest; they either like to pity him for having been led into such numberless follies, or they find a certain fascination in his presence because he is considered dangerous. More idle females in the

higher ranks of society have gone to destruction from that desire to set a bad man straight, or a wish to know what a flirtation with a bad man would be like, than ever did from downright love or passion.

But Honour Pemberton was not formed in that mould. As she looked at Monsieur de Vieuxville and saw how handsome he was, as she listened to his conversation—and now that he had really begun to talk she found he was not only clever and well-informed, but brilliant and witty,—the recollection of his wasted, misspent youth came up. She grieved to think that so coarse a soul could be hidden under an exterior so charming, and reproached herself for being untrue to her principles in tolerating a man like this, when a single one of his vices committed by a woman would have caused her to shut that woman from her presence for ever.

But however evil his record, Monsieur de Vieuxville certainly proved an exceedingly agreeable companion, and, in spite of her prejudices, Honour forgot as completely as he appeared to do that he was spending the whole evening instead of confining himself to the ceremonious visit which circumstances might have been supposed to demand.

How the conversation strayed away from ordinary topics to discussions upon literature and art, Honour could not have told; but before she realized it they were talking on such subjects, and she found herself expressing honest opinions in a fashion unusual with her, except in the society of people who were really friends. Somehow she understood that he was uttering sentiments equally sincere, and was, like herself, a little surprised at having been beguiled into such frankness.

À propos to some English book which they chanced to mention, he spoke again in English. They conversed for some moments in that language—she only became conscious of it by a sudden wonder at the purity of his accent—there was no trace even of a foreign idiom. She said this; an excusable speech to a Frenchman—a compliment, indeed—since the nation, as a rule, is incapable of articulating an intelligible sentence in a stranger tongue.

"I ought to speak with ease," he answered; "I had two native languages. I cannot remember which I spoke first, French or English; I always spoke the latter with my mother."

"She must have had a perfect knowledge of it," Honour said.

"She was an American," Monsieur de Vieuxville replied.

"An American?" repeated Honour, surprised out of her good manners, as will happen occasionally to the most conventional people.

"English by descent—a Stukely—a descendant of the Lord Stukely who went into exile in the reign of James II., along with so many of the best families in England."

"Indeed," Honour said—only politely now—brought back to simple politeness by the consciousness that she was feeling a sudden interest in this romantic side of his maternal ancestry.

"Robert Stukely established himself in Virginia," Monsieur continued, "and sensibly set to work to accumulate a fortune. My mother was his great-grand-daughter. Her father was ambassador at the French Court, where my father met her. She was a great beauty—that is her portrait over the centre bookcase."

Honour turned to look.

"The room is too dark; I cannot see it," she said.

He rose, took one of the candelabra from the chimney-piece, and crossed the room. Honour followed. He held the candles so that the light fell full upon the picture—that of a

wonderfully lovely woman. Monsieur's eyes were the fac-simile of those of the portrait.

"How beautiful she was!" exclaimed Honour.

Monsieur did not answer. She glanced at him, and perceived that he had not heard her remark. His gaze was riveted on the portrait. The sadness which overspread his countenance made his resemblance to it still more striking. Presently he roused himself, and said,—

"It is the likeness of one of the noblest women that ever lived."

As soon as the words were uttered, he looked positively annoyed. Honour knew that he had just involuntarily thought aloud.

"The face proves it," returned she, gently.

He gave her one glance of thanks. She would not have believed his grave, sad countenance could show so much feeling.

"And your father's portrait, is that here?" she asked, with an odd sort of momentary embarrassment, such as we have all felt when some person we deemed cold and unimpressionable has unexpectedly given us a glimpse of deep emotions through the ice of reserve.

"I wonder you did not hang their portraits side by side," she said, thoughtlessly.

He was carrying the candelabrum back to its

place, and did not reply. Could her remark have annoyed him? She was afraid that, for some unknown reason, it might have done so, and as she sat down again she added,—

"You are fortunate in possessing so admirable a portrait of your mother."

He gave her a real smile; the others had been ironical, or *au bout des lèvres*, but this was an honest smile, and sadder than one would like to see on the lips of a person for whom one cared deeply.

"I have a still better likeness at my house," he said; "a miniature on ivory."

"Do you live near?" she asked.

"I thought I wrote to explain—I think I did," returned he. "I have reserved for myself a pavilion in the park, half-way between this château and the factory."

"I had forgotten," she replied.

"I had always reserved that when trying to let the château," he continued, in a dry, business-like tone, "it is so far from the house, that it could never be of the least use to any tenant."

"I hope it is pretty and comfortable," Honour said, from sheer inability to find a more sensible response.

"It was built a hundred and fifty years

ago, to please the whim of an ancestress of mine, Adelaide de Vieuxville. She was a *chanoinesse*, and chose, when she came to visit her brother, to have a separate residence. Yes, it is very pretty and commodious—picturesque, too."

"I noticed that the village near the station bears your family name. I suppose it once belonged to the estate," observed Honour, irresistibly impelled, as you and I have so often been, to pursue a subject we could have wished to let alone.

"The village, and many miles beyond," he answered. "The estate has shrunk to the park and a few scores of acres besides," he added, with the odd smile which had already perplexed her.

"I think I have been told there was a still older château?"

"Yes; you can see the ruins at the left of this house. The ancient building was destroyed by fire. This was built in the early years of Francis the First's reign—indeed, the rooms you occupy were originally arranged for his occupation."

"I hope there are no ghosts," said Honour, trying to laugh. Somehow, his stateliness was just now painful rather than annoying.

"I think if there are, they would be more likely to follow the outcast than stay to disturb the new proprietor," returned he, with an effort at playfulness which his face belied.

He sat down again, and began speaking of the business, referring to certain questions in her letters which he had not fully answered, giving her clear explanations in regard to the details of the business. He took a couple of memorandum-books from his pocket, and showed her figures and dry-as-dust matters which somewhat appalled her, in spite of her determination to become thoroughly practical and commonplace.

Neither remembered how late it had grown until Sultan—whether intentionally or not is beyond my power to decide—made them aware of the hour. The doors into the dining-room were not latched; Sultan stalked majestically down the length of the library, and flung himself so violently against one of the leaves that he pushed it ajar. The clock in the *salle à manger* was striking eleven! In his character of a French cat, Sultan may have had an eye to the proprieties, and wished to warn his new mistress that it was high time for a solitary female to bid adieu to a masculine guest.

Monsieur de Vieuxville rose as quickly as if

Sultan had privately advised him that he was trespassing against the rules of Gallic decorum.

"I must beg pardon for keeping you up so late," he said; "I am sure you are tired after your journey."

"Not at all. I wished to hear more about the business," she replied.

"And have I made its working clear?" he asked.

"Perfectly; I am sure I quite understand," she answered. "If it is fine to-morrow morning I shall visit the factory."

"What time may we expect you? or shall I come for you?" he asked.

"Thanks; I need not trouble you. I shall go over about half-past ten," she answered.

He expressed, in courteous, but rather cold terms, his pleasure at her having decided to make a personal supervision of matters, bade her good night, and went away.

Honour still sat for some time by the fire, at first thinking about him and his unlikeness to the sort of man she had looked to meet; then about his mother, wondering why her memory saddened him.

Presently her fancies wandered far off to more personal matters, and, as her life was not replete with interest, grew sad and dreary.

Again the clock chimed the hour—twelve this time. Honour rose in haste, dismayed to remember that she had not told Céline to go to bed if she were late. She dropped her handkerchief, and, as she stooped to pick it up, she saw a folded paper lying on the rug near her chair.

She opened the sheet carelessly. It contained rows of figures and sundry memoranda in pencil. Evidently Monsieur de Vieuxville had let it fall out of his pocket-book.

Honour went upstairs, holding the paper in her hand. Céline was fast asleep in the anteroom. Without waking her, Mrs. Pemberton passed on into the boudoir, opened an escritoire, and laid the document in a drawer; and very odd and puzzled her face looked as she did so.

CHAPTER III.

MAYNE'S COUSIN.

NATURE had apparently determined that if it was in her power to render the new-comer's first impressions of Normandy utterly distasteful, her mysterious ladyship meant to do it. Honour woke the next morning to the sounds of a positive tempest. The rain beat in sheets against the casements; the wind surged up from the sea with a purgatorial wail, crashing through the tops of the great oaks in the park and twisting their stalwart branches about like weeds, as if it suffered so horribly itself that it found an evil satisfaction in making every object it met suffer too.

This was Honour's thought as she stood looking out upon the strife of the elements. The château was built on an eminence, so that the landscape ought to have been visible for miles; but the sky was one vast grey pall, and a curtain of impenetrable mist shut out everything except the nearest trees.

Honour thought this, then told herself that she was beginning the day in the fanciful, foolish mood in which she had ended the previous one, and resolved to be practical and commonplace. In pursuance of this laudable determination, she discussed household matters with Céline,—the capabilities of the new servants,—the state of the dwelling, of which they took a lengthened survey to decide what would be needed to render it comfortable according to modern ideas, which regard as simple necessities such shoals of things that to a bygone generation would have been unheard-of luxuries.

Mrs. Somers accompanied them in their investigating tour. She had any number of suggestions to offer, and was equally astonished whether Honour rejected or appeared to take them into favourable consideration.

But in spite of constant occupation, Mrs. Pemberton found the day a long one, and was forced many times to call her wandering thoughts to order; and the effort to be dignified and sensible, even in her meditations, grew harder as the hours and the tempest swept moaning by.

Late in the afternoon the weather cleared as suddenly as the storm had come on. Honour

persuaded Mrs. Somers out on the terrace for a little exercise—a very little always went a great way with the elderly lady, and after a few turns she pleaded to be allowed to go in-doors.

Honour walked round to the western side of the house. The sunset was gorgeous—great billows of flame-colour and red streamed across the sky, and she could look for miles over a picturesque landscape, fields and woods—châteaux rising dark and solemn, old convents lifting their century-worn fronts, hamlets scattered here and there, a low bluish-grey line far off on the edge of the horizon giving token of the sea.

Where she stood portions of the ruins of the ancient castle were visible, their decay beautified by the masses of ivy and clematis, which had twined themselves about the remains of the round tower, clung to every mouldering buttress, and clustered over every fragment of wall.

The grand avenue with the high-road beyond was the only reasonable direction for a practical woman to take in the present state of slop and wet; so Honour passed down under the double line of mighty oaks, whose boughs the wind, spent though it was, still had force

enough to sway slowly back and forth till they seemed to be saluting Honour as she moved on, whispering sadly too, as if oppressed by some mournful secret which they were trying to make clear to her dull human comprehension.

The lodge-keeper's wife was standing at the door of her pretty dwelling, two sturdy children playing near. Honour, anew disgusted by her fancy about what the trees said,—a fancy so unworthy common sense, who was henceforth to be her tutelar deity,—stopped to speak kindly to the woman and to pat the children's apple cheeks. After she was out in the road, hurrying along as if some urgent duty awaited her beyond, she was thinking of the happiness of that humble Norman peasant in possessing a source of such constant interest and hope. Little children! It must be so beautiful to have them—to understand a mother's feeling; and Honour sighed, then coloured, as if she had been guilty of some coarse or indelicate thought.

She walked on till she came to where two roads branched off from the highway. She turned down the one to the left, certain that it would lead her back toward the château, probably joining the principal route again between

that and the hamlet near the sugar factory. Presently she reached a steep hill, and, having mounted it, she could see that she was correct in her supposition, only the road wound round so many ascents and about so many bits of woodland, that to follow it would take much more time than to retrace her steps by the highway. However, she had no mind to turn back, and on she went, still hastening along as if some important errand called her, and she afraid of reaching her goal too late.

The last hues of sunset had died some time before she gained the angle from whence the road curved toward the one she had left. The twilight was deepening rapidly, the sky looked grey and dark, but she could distinguish the highway and the park-wall, while above the trees the château turrets loomed black against the horizon.

There was another hill to mount—a bit of woodland to traverse, which ended on the edge of the highway. She had almost crossed its gloom—she could look out through the vista of trees to the other road. Just where the routes joined, a stone bench had been placed under the shadow of a graceful elm.

Two human figures were visible—a woman seated on the bench, a man standing beside

her. Honour was near enough to perceive that the lady held her handkerchief to her eyes, and seemed to be sobbing bitterly. The man was leaning toward her, talking earnestly, one hand extended, in eager pleading.

Honour saw all this; then another discovery brought her instinctively to a standstill. In the man she recognized Monsieur de Vieuxville. At the same instant the girl pulled the handkerchief from before her face with an angry gesture. Honour could see her countenance plainly—that of a young girl, not more than eighteen at the most—a face of bright, passionate beauty, in spite of its pallor and agitation; not a Norman type—a face such as Honour had often seen among the women of Arles and the Basque country.

Before she could think clearly enough to decide whether to turn back or go on, the girl sprang to her feet, and, without a word or glance at her companion, ran swiftly down the highway in the direction of the hamlet.

Monsieur de Vieuxville stood still for a second,—very troubled and wearied his countenance looked,—then he turned and walked away. Honour moved slowly forward. As she came out into the road she glanced in the direction the two had taken. The girl had

disappeared; Monsieur de Vieuxville had reached an angle in the park-wall a goodly distance off. Honour saw him stop and put his hand in his pocket. Another second, and he was gone. She comprehended that just there was the private gate by which he gained access to the pavilion where he resided.

What had she seen? Who was this girl, and what the meaning of that abruptly-terminated interview? All those evil reports in regard to Monsieur de Vieuxville flashed across Honour's mind. She hated bad stories —she shrank from the idea of wickedness as from an actual physical hurt—she felt degraded when forced into any knowledge of it. She was hurrying on, anxious to put the scene and everything connected with the man out of her mind. Just then, forth from the bit of woodland she had left, there bounded a great dog, barking furiously — a sinister-looking mastiff, with evil eyes, and horrible, wide-open, red jaws. He was dashing directly towards her; and though, as a rule, Honour had no fear of animals, and could usually make friends with the wildest horse or most savage dog, she was startled by the sudden appearance of the beast, and his evident hostile intentions where she was concerned.

To run would be useless; besides, it was in Honour's character to face unavoidable danger at once, rather than to prolong suffering by trying to fly from it.

However, there was no possibility of playing either heroine or poltroon. A man's voice called,—

"Judge! Judge!"

The dog hesitated, but seemed inclined to continue his headlong career, and do his new enemy a mischief before obeying that imperative summons. But a third and sterner repetition of his name brought him to a standstill. Honour saw a gentleman rush forward; he carried a heavy stick in his hand, and the dog received a blow full in his mouth, which sent him howling away.

"I am very sorry, Madame," the gentleman said, in French, approaching Honour, and lifting his hat. "I never knew Judge to behave so before. I do not think he would have bitten you; but I do beg your pardon."

A young man; rather under medium height, but with a form so well proportioned that one would hardly have thought that; bright, flashing eyes; an eager, passionate, impulsive face, to which the force and massiveness of the clear-cut under-jaw gave an expression

of strength. Evidently a gentleman, too—at least, conventionally speaking; appearance and voice showed this. Honour noticed these things with a woman's quickness even while she was answering his courteous excuses.

"I should not have been frightened only that he took me by surprise," she said. "I am quite near my own gate, however, and could have called for help—I ought to have remembered that."

Again the gentleman lifted his hat, and said,—this time in English, which language his slight foreign accent when he spoke French had prepared Honour to recognize as his native tongue,—

"Then I have the honour of addressing Mrs. Pemberton?"

She bowed assent.

"My cousin, Madame de Marsan, was speaking of you only to-day, and promising me the pleasure of an introduction. I am dreadfully sorry to have introduced myself in such an unpleasant manner," he continued, with a laugh that was almost boyish, and very pleasant to hear.

"I met Madame de Marsan last winter in Rome," Honour said. "I hope she is quite well?"

"Perfectly, thanks. She has talked of nothing but your probable arrival for the last week; she will be delighted to hear that you have come at last."

"And I shall be very glad to renew my acquaintance with her," Honour replied; "our meeting in Italy has left delightful recollections in my mind."

"I think she is a very general favourite—she ought to be."

"Yes; I have seldom met so charming a woman."

She bowed, meaning to go her way.

"Will you let me see you to the gates?" he asked. "It is getting dark."

He walked on beside her, Honour asking polite questions about his relative.

"I forgot," he said, suddenly, with another laugh. "You know Judge's name—the brute!—but not mine. Please let me present Gerard Mayne to you; and I do beg that you will not hate me for ever on account of Judge's wickedness."

"I will even try to forgive Judge," she answered, with a smile. "By the way, he has not ventured to show himself since his punishment."

"He probably thought it wise to make for home—I shall disown him henceforth."

"Perhaps he will learn to display conduct more in keeping with his stately name," said Honour.

The woman at this moment opened the gate.

"When shall I tell my cousin she may come to see you?" Mayne asked.

"The sooner the better," she replied.

"Then to-morrow?"

"Certainly—after twelve I shall be free: if it is fine, I must go in the morning to visit the Sugar Works."

"Ah, yes. You have not seen them yet? Then to-morrow? Effie will be charmed. And—and—may I tell her that you consented to let her bring her unworthy cousin?"

It was not possible to resist his winning manner.

"He shall bring himself," said Honour, laughing; "and Judge may come too—it will be wise for me to make a friend of him if he and I are likely to meet often."

They exchanged farewell salutations, Mayne contriving to say several pretty and complimentary things about his pleasure at this encounter without their sounding either silly or stilted.

Honour walked rapidly up the avenue, conscience-stricken to remember that she should

have to keep Mrs. Somers waiting for dinner while she dressed, thinking, too, that her new acquaintance was agreeable and handsome enough to be the relative of fascinating Madame de Marsan.

Gerard Mayne passed down the road toward the hamlet, muttering to himself after a fashion he had. His cousin said that he was such an inveterate talker he must needs hold conversations with himself when no sensible person was at hand for him to victimize. Then he began to whistle, executing several bars from 'La donna è mobile' so sweetly, that they sounded fairly like the notes of a bird.

Suddenly he began to laugh—that gay, infectious laugh of his: the very shadows seemed inspired by it, and the darkness echoed it back.

"She saw them," he said, half aloud. "I would stake my life she saw them! What a jolly lark! I should like to tell Effie, but I'll just hold my tongue. And stately Monsieur—ah ha! my gentleman, if I can read character in the least, you will have hard work to set yourself right in that woman's eyes—what handsome eyes they are, by the way—after what she has seen to-night, decorous and proper as you set up for being in these days."

Once more he laughed, not wickedly; as if there were something irresistibly comical in the ideas suggested to his mind. Then again he struck into 'La donna è mobile,' and whistled it from beginning to end with so many skilful flourishes that one might have thought he had devoted as much study to the accomplishment as an operatic tenor does to the ordinary sort of *roulades.*

Mayne had turned off upon the road, the route by which Honour had come home, only, of course, following it in the inverse direction. At the foot of the second hill he came to a stone farmhouse, through whose narrow windows shone a cheerful blaze. He stopped there and called loudly in his clear baritone. The door of the dwelling opened presently, and a man appeared, carrying a lantern.

"Is that you, Monsieur Gerard?" he asked. "You want your horse, I suppose."

Mayne had begun to whistle again, while waiting for his summons to be answered.

"It is I, Monsieur Gerard, and I do want my horse," he replied. "I hope you had the grace to feed him, Father Petiout, since I have been gone so much longer than I expected."

"I did—a measure of good corn, Monsieur Gerard."

"Norman measure, I suppose, you old rogue."

"Monsieur must have his jest," returned the farmer, with a fat laugh, which suited his proportions.

"It will be a poor joke for me if I get home so late that I lose my dinner, so please to bring out Don Juan."

The farmer took himself and his lantern into a stable near the gate, and soon emerged, leading a handsome black horse by the bridle. During his absence, Mayne had leaned against the wall and whistled. Apparently his temperament was too easy for him to fret and fume as most men do over delays of any kind.

He put some money into Father Petiout's open palm, mounted Don Juan and rode away, flinging back a carelessly good-natured farewell to the old farmer.

It had grown very dark, but both Don Juan and his master knew the road too well to be at a loss, and the horse dashed on as if aware that his rider had not dined, and feeling in so charitable a mood after his own dinner, that he desired to give the young man an opportunity to satisfy as quickly as might be the cravings of his stomach. Mayne had a gallop of perhaps

two miles, then he reached the entrance to some rather extensive grounds. Not far back from the road was visible a broad gleam of light, marking the place where the house stood —this was La Chataigneraie, the residence of Mayne's cousin.

"Here I am!" said the young man to himself, as he drew rein at the steps of the verandah. "A jolly gallop—have seen a pretty woman, and, better than all, had the fun of knowing that stately Jupiter de Vieuxville runs the risk of finding himself in bad odour with his new employer. Poor devil! I am sure I wish him no harm."

A servant appeared to take his horse—Mayne had pleasant words for him too. The young man seemed so overflowing with health and joyous spirits, that it was natural for him to wish to be agreeable to every creature that approached him.

As he reached the house-doors he stopped to call after the domestic,—

"Jean, have you seen Judge?"

"Yes, Monsieur; he came home just at dusk, and sneaked into his kennel. I think he must have been fighting, for his jaws were covered with blood."

"No; I had to beat him. Poor Judge," said

Mayne. "I hope you remembered to give him a bone, as a consolation."

"Yes, Monsieur; I carried out his supper myself."

"Thanks, Jean. Good night."

There were more kindly words for the servant who met him in the entrance-hall and relieved him of his outer coat.

"Am I awfully late, Antoine?" he asked.

"Dinner has been ready some minutes, but Madame has not gone into the dining-room yet. Monsieur is still in his studio."

"I shall be ready by the time he remembers that dining is a necessity," said Mayne, and dashed upstairs three steps at a time.

A bright fire was burning on the hearth in his room, his evening dress hung ready on the rack. Mayne did not indulge in a valet, but he was adored by Prudence, the chambermaid, a woman so sinfully ugly that never during the forty years of her earthly pilgrimage had she found reason to belie her baptismal appellation. She took such care of him and his belongings, that, at least in his cousin's house, he never had an opportunity to miss that most troublesome of treasures, "an own man."

He was out of his morning clothes and faultless in dinner costume—perfect even to the

bow of his white neck-tie, that reef whereon ordinary masculine humanity wrecks its peace nightly—in less time than most of his sex would have required for the putting on a pair of boots.

He descended to the ground-floor; the house was only two stories in height, and all the living rooms were on the lower *étage*.

He entered a spacious, handsome drawing-room, too low for its length, but furnished so carefully that this very fault helped to give it a cozy, home-like appearance. At the further end draperies of some heavy pale blue material were sufficiently drawn aside to give glimpses of an apartment beyond—evidently the boudoir and favourite retreat of the mistress of the mansion—the shaded lamps burning therein lighting up the pretty nest to make its luxurious appointments visible to any one traversing the salon.

Close to the second fireplace, nestled on a low ottoman, sat a lady in a dress which was some wonderful combination of black and amber, simple enough not to be too showy for a home toilette, yet so elegant that, even in a room crowded with women attired in the latest inspirations of Worth, it would have been noticeable.

A pretty woman? The question would be difficult to answer: strangers seldom thought

her so; the people who knew her would have sworn that Effie de Marsan, if not beautiful, had a face more charming than any famous beauty of the age.

Where she sat she could see Mayne's approach in the mirror. Her first glance was to see that her attitude was faultless—that would have been her first thought had she seen death approach instead of a human being. When he reached the hearth she was leaning her head against one of the carved columns which supported the mantel, her hands linked across her knee, her eyes dreamily fixed on the fire.

"I hope I am not late: good evening—how do you do?" he called.

She did not start; she only said, without looking up,—

"I wish you would not come in as still as a ghost, and then frighten one out of one's wits by suddenly firing such a three-barrel revolver of questions close to one's ear."

He laughed. He had seen her glance at his reflection in the mirror, but he did not say so.

"It is jolly to find oneself housed such a dark night," said he.

"And it is very 'jolly,' as you phrase it, to see anybody appear in such good spirits," returned she, disturbing her attitude sufficiently

to extend him a hand that would have been a model, except for its being a little too thin.

"Where is De Marsan?" he asked, after bowing over her fingers as ceremoniously as if she had been a queen.

"Still in his beloved *atelier*, I suppose," she answered, rather wearily.

"It is after the dinner-hour."

"By good sixty seconds! I hope you, at least, will be condescending enough to find some excuse for your tardiness."

"I have one which I think would appease your eternal wrath, if my imagination could go far enough to believe you arrived at that extremity," returned Mayne.

"Then it must be sufficiently important to hold a sensation," cried she, gaily. "You shall tell it me at table. I really do not think it my wifely duty to wait any longer for Léon. I am famished."

Mayne offered her his arm. He was as intimate with his cousin as if she had been his sister, but he never forgot a single one of the conventional courtesies which made a part of Madame de Marsan's religion. I employ the latter word advisedly, for Effie considered herself a religious woman, and seldom missed a church-service; indeed, in town was a frequent

attendant of the early ones, when she chanced to rank among her devotees a man who could be persuaded into accompanying her to, or meeting her at, matins.

It was necessary to cross the entrance-hall in order to reach the dining-room. Effie's genius had been equal to this stupid arrangement of the house. Double doors shut out the vestibule at one end, curtains hid the staircase at the other. The space left in the centre was furnished like a reception-room, and had an immense fireplace, in which burned logs of odorous pine-wood.

When they entered the cheerful *salle à manger*, Monsieur de Marsan stood at one of the windows. He had pushed the curtains and one shutter back, and was looking out into the night. He did not hear them enter. Mayne made a little pause. Madame de Marsan drew him on.

"He does not choose to hear," she whispered, in an aggrieved tone, which caused her cousin to smile again secretly.

As she seated herself at the table, and motioned Mayne to take the place next her, Monsieur de Marsan turned round.

"I beg your pardon, I did not hear you come in," he said, in English.

"I have only been waiting an hour for you," returned his wife, with martyr-like resignation.

The colour rose in Monsieur's cheeks, his eyes flashed angrily.

"The other night—"

He stopped abruptly, and set his lips hard under his moustache.

"What happened the other night?" she asked, looking across the table with a smile at once insolent aud haughty.

He bit the ends of his moustache, but did not speak.

"Will you be good enough to finish your sentence?" said she.

"Yes, I will!" he exclaimed, with a sudden excitement, which was a strange contrast to his wearied, languid air when he approached the table.

"I am waiting." She bowed graciously as she spoke, yet a blow in the face could not have been more irritating than her manner.

"I went in to ask you to come to dinner. Monsieur de Chantal was there. You requested me not to come and watch you," he said, with a repressed passion in his tone, not pleasant to hear, from the possibilities of wrath it suggested.

"I did," she answered; "after?"

If the man's face expressed his feelings correctly, there must have been a stormy retort close to his lips; but he only said, in an odd, slow voice,—

"Only that I did not wish to appear to watch you."

"When I was alone," said she.

"You were not alone."

"Oh!" I wish I could give an idea of the scornful derision that ejaculation held. "Is it to be Gerard now?"

"I am always glad to see Gerard, and he knows it," said Monsieur, holding out his hand to the guest with a graceful friendliness Effie herself could not have surpassed. Mayne grasped the extended hand with a warm pressure.

"I was alone till Gerard came," said she.

"After Monsieur de Chantal went away," he retorted.

She laughed contemptuously.

"Your watch is not well kept," said she; "Monsieur de Chantal left for Paris yesterday."

De Marsan frowned darkly, and pushed aside his plate. Effie rose from the table.

"If we are to have a scene I will dine in my own room," she said.

"There will be no scene unless you make it," returned De Marsan. "The question is, are we to have any dinner at all? Gerard, you will think we mean to let you starve."

Madame de Marsan rang a hand-bell. In a moment the man appeared with the soup-tureen. As he gave his mistress her plate, she said,—

"Do not fail another time, Jean, to tell me when Monsieur is ready for dinner. He works very hard, you must remember, and ought not to be kept waiting an instant."

Looking out from under the covert of his heavy eyelashes, Mayne saw De Marsan's fingers close over the handle of his knife; the gesture and glance said as plainly as words could have done, that his first impulse was to cut the woman's throat from ear to ear. In half a second he was leaning calmly back in his chair, and saying, lazily,—

"Thanks, Effie—you are very considerate."

"I mean to be," she replied; and now she gave him a smile as sweet as the fondest husband could have asked.

Mayne began to talk—brilliant nonsense—but so well done that both laughed heartily. They spoke in French because Effie preferred

it, except when she and Léon were quarrelling before the servants.

"But you had some news for me," she said to Mayne.

"My excuses, you mean, for being late!"

"Well, they implied that some news they were to contain was your one hope of pardon."

"Ah, yes—I had an adventure."

"Good gracious! Don't keep me in suspense."

"I came out in the light of a hero and a saviour—"

"For this occasion only," broke in Effie. "Tell, tell!"

"I saved a pretty woman from the jaws of a roaring—"

"I hope not young man, for she would not thank you," interrupted De Marsan in his turn.

Effie shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"I am so tired of witticisms as old as the Flood," she murmured.

"I wish there were other things as old that you were tired of," retorted he.

"Am I to be permitted to hear your story?" she asked, lifting her eyes to Mayne's face with a pleading glance—a glance which in reality meant nothing whatever, unless it might be just in the way of practice; yet, pretty as

it was, not the sort of look any husband would wish to see his wife bestow upon another man.

"I am too anxious to tell you who has come to be dramatic," laughed Mayne. "Judge flew at Mrs. Pemberton, and gave me an opportunity to make her acquaintance—she is charming."

"I am so glad she has come!" cried Effie. "You are the best old boy in the world to bring me such delightful news. I shall go to-morrow to see her."

"She expects you, and she said I might come too."

"*Mauvais sujet!*" laughed Effie. "Shall you go, Léon?"

"If you wish."

Effie grew immensely gay, and Mayne supported her. De Marsan came out of his gloominess and roused into spirits which surpassed theirs, though too feverish to be quite pleasant to any person who had taken the trouble to watch him closely. He was polite and gallant to his wife, and Effie beamed amiably upon him. Monsieur de Marsan had reached that stage of unhappiness—with his morbid, nervous temperament he could not stop there long—when he was willing and glad to shut his eyes and be thoughtless and recklessly

merry, if only for one evening. De Chantal was gone; he might return in a week, or another might take his vacant place; but, at least for the moment, there was no one. Effie was kind and cordial; nay, almost coquettishly attractive as to other men; as she used to be to him. Let him forget that it was only because there was no new man present; that, so strong was the demon of coquetry within her, that, after all which had come and gone, she must flirt with her own husband when the mood seized her.

Perhaps it was weak and silly, but he loved her. That may be no excuse—I give it because it was the only one he had to offer himself. He loved her! He was a passionate, hot-headed man, with a fiery temper. She had her reasons for complaint; but, at least in word, thought, and deed, he had been faithful to her, and his life and celebrity offered temptations which, in similar cases, have made many a woman rue the hour when she married a genius.

He loved her! Many a time he had wondered that he had not murdered her! There were seasons when, in his blind anguish, he cried out to God to keep him from this crowning wickedness; for, like Effie, he could pray, and Heaven knows he did, fervently enough and often enough. How much was nervous

excitement, how much the result of real faith, it would have been no easier to decide in his case than in that of his wife.

He loved her! Pray as he would, struggle as he might to avoid sinful thoughts, there were seasons when he wished he had strangled her on their wedding-day. That wedding-day, lying years back now in the past,—that quiet ceremonial, watched only by a little knot of their nearest friends,—that journey, when the prosaic railway-train was a heavenly chariot,—when the ugly village where they were obliged to stop for a day's rest on account of her fatigue became a paradisaical place of sojourn freshly let down from fairy-land! Could he ever forget that time? O God! could he ever cease to wish that he had murdered her then, in the golden hour of his bliss, and died at her feet afterward?

Mad thoughts—weak, foolish thoughts; but they haunted him night and day, stood beside him as he sat at his easel, went with him in his walks, followed him out into the world, added themselves to his other suffering to make a hell so black that the lasting perdition which Effie de Marsan once in his hearing prayed to God might be his portion, could not have been darker or more hopeless.

CHAPTER IV.

GRACIEUSE.

THE next morning was as bright and beautiful as though the weather, ashamed of its late evil behaviour, wished to make amends, and, if possible, even do away with the recollection of its bad temper.

Honour was so tired of her own gloominess that she tried her best to imitate the weather; and the gorgeous sunlight did banish her morbid fancies, so that she was able to get back to her ordinary cheerful state of mind. Then, too, there was the satisfaction of having something to occupy her; the sugar factory to visit; afterwards, Madame de Marsan would come; then Mrs. Somers's drive, in which she liked a companion—and Honour never neglected her duty in that particular.

"Would you like to go with me this morning?" she asked, while paying her usual matutinal visit to her cousin. "I am going over the factory."

But Mrs. Somers shuddered at the idea. She was afraid of factories. "I always expect something to go off," said she. "You may find yourself forty feet up in the air at any minute. It surprises me that anybody can run such risks."

"Why, my dear Aurora,"—this was Mrs. Somers's name, and a more delightful misnomer could not have been imagined,—"you speak as if it was a powder-mill," laughed Honour.

"No matter what you call it, Works are Works, and they are all awful things," returned Mrs. Somers. "The best plan for you is to sell them to somebody who does not mind being blown up or maimed for life with boiling sugar, or something, every day or two."

"But a sugar factory—"

"No matter what their names are, and indeed I would rather not hear them. I tell you Factories are Works, and Works are Factories, and more like a conception of the Evil One than anything else," interrupted Mrs. Somers, with mingled dignity and solemnity. "I hope you will not visit them any oftener than you can help, for I shall never have an easy moment when I know you are there."

"First I am going out for a good gallop,"

said Honour, thinking it wise to change the subject. It always took Aurora several days to get exactly straight in her mind after one of her sick headache attacks. "They tell me that Queen is in splendid condition, and I want exercise."

Queen was Honour's pet horse, which had been sent down some time before from Paris.

"When shall you be back?"

"For *déjeûner*—at half-past twelve. Have you got everything to make you comfortable?"

"Oh yes; and these are such pretty rooms it is a pleasure to sit in them. You never forget the least thing I like, Honour," said Mrs. Somers, for she appreciated the attention she received from her relative in a way that many elderly people would not have done.

"I should be a brute to forget, when you want so little," replied Honour, kissing her first on one cheek, then the other — pretty cheeks, too, though Mrs. Somers was nearly sixty, with faint wintry roses blooming in them still. "Good-bye, dear, for a while."

Honour went out of the room singing a little Neapolitan song—the surest sign in the world that she had recovered her spirits. She met Céline in the corridor, and was greeted with,—"Ah, Madame looks like herself this morning!

It is a pleasure to hear her go singing about once more."

"This lovely day would make a stone sing," said Honour. "Tell them to bring out Queen, please, then come and help me into my habit. I want to go out immediately."

Céline flew off with her usual alacrity, and was back in a trice, following her mistress into her room. Half an hour more and Honour was scouring away over hill and dale, Queen seeming to share her delight in the beauty of the morning, and asking nothing better than to be allowed to dash on at the very top of her speed. They had a grand race against the swift morning breeze. Martin, the groom, thought his mistress a foolish woman to go at such a pace for nothing, and the horse he bestrode apparently thought the same in regard to Queen, as he utterly refused to do more than keep the mare and her rider in sight. Honour never drew rein till she reached the top of a lofty hill miles away, whose blue summit she had seen from her own gates. As she had expected, there was from here a fine view of the sea, spreading out golden and bright in the sun. Honour would have liked to go down to the shore, but a glance at her watch showed her that it would be eleven by the time she

could reach the sugar works, and punctuality was one of Honour's hobbies.

The great clock on the front of the building, in which were situated the counting-house and business rooms, struck the hour just as Honour checked Queen at the outer doors. Before Joseph could come up with them, Monsieur de Vieuxville appeared.

"Good morning, Madame," he said, in his grave, courteous way. "I heard that you were out on horseback, so I fancied we should have the pleasure of a visit from you. I am glad we have a bright morning at last; yesterday was enough to prejudice you against our *belle Normandie*."

Honour answered him politely. To any person who knew her well, her somewhat distant manner would have been a proof that she had a prejudice against him, whatever her feelings might be towards his native Normandy. Indeed, the sight of his face rather damped her good spirits, but she hastily told herself that it was not worth while to afford him a sufficient place in her thoughts for his presence to have any effect whatever.

"Can I help you to dismount?" he asked.

"Thanks. I can always get down best alone." He made a movement to take the

bridle. "Pray do not trouble yourself," she added, "Queen will stand quite still."

"What a beautiful creature she is," said Monsieur.

"And as good and kind as she is handsome," returned Honour.

"One could not ask higher praise for a human being," said Monsieur, with his rare laugh—a low, sweet laugh, but never a gay one.

"Very often one could not bestow so high in that quarter," said Honour, and then felt vexed with herself for the misanthropic sounding speech.

By this time Joseph had arrived; he dismounted, and stood waiting to take Queen when his mistress descended; he knew her ways too well to make the blunder Monsieur de Vieuxville had of offering assistance.

Honour slipped her foot out of the stirrup, gathered the folds of her habit in one hand, and sprang lightly and steadily to the ground.

She looked wonderfully well, *en Amazone*—the breeze had given her a colour—her looks were at their best this morning. Monsieur de Vieuxville's rather hypercritical artistic taste was pleased; somehow she felt it, and, respectful as his glance of admiration was, it vexed

her as much as a rude stare from another man would have done. He offered her his arm.

"Thanks," she said, "but my skirt requires the use of both hands."

"These are the counting-houses," he observed; "will you visit these first?"

"I will go on to the beet sugar-mill, if you please," she answered—I am afraid inspired with this resolve simply because his question had seemed to invite her to do otherwise.

"This way, then, Madame."

Very few women can walk decently in a habit, but Penthesilia herself—always supposing that she submitted to the thraldom of a long skirt—could not have managed it with more grace than Honour.

They went through rumbling, noisy beet washing and pressing rooms. The foremen were duly presented to their new employer and received kindly notice. As Honour turned oftenest to ask questions of the head man who accompanied them in their progress, Monsieur de Vieuxville almost ceased to offer remarks, though he looked more as if his taciturnity arose from his being too grand to undertake the task of explaining details, than because he was aware of any intention on her part to leave him in the background.

The visit was a success; Honour, interested in what she saw, the foremen charmed by her affability, and the workmen partly from an enthusiastic pleasure at having a young and pretty woman at their head, partly owing to the *douceur* which they knew she was leaving with one of the head *employés* for extra quarts of cider, wherein the community was to drink her health, set up a great cheer, which came so unexpectedly, that Honour was a little startled, though she remembered to bow and smile.

"And a cheer for Monsieur!" cried somebody.

This was given with a will, too, and Monsieur was as stately in his graciousness as ever one of the famous Crusaders among his ancestors could have been when riding at the head of his clump of spears and receiving applause for some chivalrous or daring deed, of which so many were chronicled in regard to the Vieuxvilles of olden days.

Honour and Monsieur walked back to the counting-house, entering from the side toward the factory. There was a long gloomy passage —on either hand several doors. Monsieur opened the first one to the left, and ushered Honour into a spacious room, carpeted and soberly furnished.

"This apartment was the private office of your relative when he visited the Works," de Vieuxville said. "I am afraid it looks rather a gloomy place to feminine eyes. I had visions of ordering white curtains and nicknacks to brighten it up a little, but I waited instructions, not being familiar with the tastes of your sex."

"I like it as it is," Honour replied; "it certainly looks wonderfully tidy."

A great bouquet of beautiful spring flowers stood on one of the tables. Honour had a passion for flowers. The sight of the odorous blossoms, in which she immediately buried her face, softened her toward Monsieur.

"I have to thank you for something prettier than any nicknacks," she added, as she looked up.

Monsieur smiled, and shook his head.

"I must not steal what is another person's due," he said. "It must have been Mademoiselle Galais who remembered to put them here. I asked her to give an eye to the room before you came."

"Mademoiselle Galais?" she repeated, interrogatively.

"The daughter of the head book-keeper," Monsieur explained; indeed, his assistant, for

she does a great deal of her father's work—the old gentleman is growing somewhat infirm."

"I remember his name now," Honour said; "my uncle mentioned him particularly in his last letter to me—the will left him a pension, too."

"Yes; he has been here for years—faithful, upright—in short, one of the best men I ever knew. Born and bred a gentleman, to use the word in its conventional sense, he has borne the reverses of fortune which forced him into hard work with a patience beyond praise."

"I shall like to know him," Honour said.

"I will send for him presently. Shall I show you my private books now, and give you a clearer idea of certain matters than I was able to do the other night?"

"If you please."

For an instant, while he had spoken so kindly of the old man, his face lighted up beautifully—he looked so noble, so strong, so capable of every good sentiment, that she could have almost said she liked him. His speaking of the business broke the spell; his face resumed its ordinary cold, grave expression, and all her preconceived prejudices strengthened by what she had seen since hre arrival started up afresh in her mind.

He opened a door into a room that was almost the fac-simile of that in which they stood.

"This is my special den," he said, moving aside, to allow her to pass.

Honour entered; he followed, and wheeled one of the arm-chairs toward a table covered with books and papers.

"To make you really understand the working of the business must of course be a matter of time," he said; "but certain things, of which we were speaking the other night, I can easily explain with the aid of these ledgers." He pulled two heavy volumes forward as he spoke. "These books contain my private accounts—your uncle examined them each month when here; during his absence I sent him a summary of their monthly contents."

He turned over different pages, showed her items, made explanations in a singularly clear, terse way. Most men would have felt it incumbent on them to be gallant—to make a jest of the affair, as if supposing a lady could not desire to give very serious attention. But Monsieur de Vieuxville did nothing of the sort; he could never have been more perfectly business-like when discussing matters with the uncle from whom she had inherited the business.

Honour listened too, and found no difficulty

in understanding, but before very long her interest flagged a little.

"I think that will do this morning," she said. "I must be at home by half-past twelve, and I should like to see Monsieur Galais first."

"I will call him," Monsieur said.

"No, no; I will go to his room," she replied.

As they crossed the apartment, Honour passed near a desk placed near one of the windows; the back was turned toward the centre of the room, and was so high, that while seated she could not see the sloping shelf that made the writing-desk. Now she saw it, and saw a bouquet there.

"I perceive that Mademoiselle Galais did not forget you either," she said.

"It may have been she; though I usually have to thank old Bettine, who sweeps the room, for such favours," he answered.

But in spite of his indifferent tone, Honour fancied that he looked annoyed at her having noticed the floral offering.

They crossed the hall, and entered an apartment whose open doors showed a smaller room beyond.

"We shall find Monsieur Galais in yonder,

I suppose," Monsieur said; "he usually sits here."

They passed on to the inner room. Seated at a desk in one of the windows, Honour saw a female figure—there was no other person visible.

"Mademoiselle, is not your father here?" Monsieur de Vieuxville called.

The girl, deeply immersed in her task of copying long lines of figures, had not heard their entrance. She started at the sudden summons; rose quickly, and turned toward the door. It was the face Honour had seen on the previous evening—the girl who had wept so passionately while Monsieur de Vieuxville stood pleading with her.

"Madame Pemberton," continued that gentleman, "this young lady is Monsieur Galais's daughter—the quickest accountant I think in all Normandy, and as unerring as she is quick."

The girl came hurriedly forward; her cheeks scarlet either with surprise at the unexpected interruption or with pleasure at this praise—Honour could not decide which. She was such a pretty creature that the sternest female censor living would have had to struggle to dislike her if the slightest vestige of a love of the beautiful had place in the mind of that epitome of

feminine virtues. A real type of Provençal beauty; great liquid black eyes—the wondrous eyes of the women of the South of France; and hair, luxuriant and wavy, of the same ebon hue. The complexion was so clear, with the white so like the soft *mat* whiteness of a magnolia blossom, the red so like the red in the heart of a tea-rose, that it would have made the most celebrated *blonde* look faded and grey. Above all and beyond all, such an expression of child-like innocence and grace in every expression and movement, that Virtue incarnate, armed with a distrust of pretty women, and helmeted with an unbelief in the possibility of such a one's goodness, would have been obliged to yield to the spell. Honour held out her hand and took the pink-tinted fingers in hers, while the girl, recovering from her astonishment, uttered a greeting as fitting in its sort and as easy as if she had been a *grande dame* or a poet.

"I begin at last to believe in Normandy sunshine," said Honour, glancing at Monsieur de Vieuxville.

"Take care," laughed he; "pretty as the compliment is, Mademoiselle Gracieuse will never forgive you if you think her a Norman."

"I fancied your father was a native of Normandy," Honour said.

"He was born here, but his family were Provençal," explained Gracieuse. "My mother was from the Basque country."

"Ah, that accounts for your pretty Christian name—I never heard it except there and at Arles."

"I was born at Arles," said Gracieuse.

"I should have known that," returned Honour, with a smile, while Gracieuse blushed beautifully at the compliment.

Mrs. Pemberton glanced at De Vieuxville.

"Yes," he said, in the cold, distant way he sometimes spoke, "one cannot help having faith in the old proverb."

While listening to his words, the recollection of the scene she had witnessed on the previous night rushed into Honour's mind. Her very soul quivered with indignation toward the man, while her heart ached for the poor child.

"And so you don't like Normandy, Mademoiselle?" she said, uttering the first words she could find, just to escape her own reflections.

"Indeed, no; such a cold, cheerless spot!" returned the girl, with a shiver.

"But summer must come," returned Honour, smiling at her energy.

"Never, I think!" cried Gracieuse, with a pretty childish vehemence. "It is always grey and ugly here."

Then she laughed gaily at her own exaggeration.

"It is too bad to prejudice Madame Pemberton against our poor Normandy," said Monsieur de Vieuxville. "I am sure the weather has already done that sufficiently."

"But I do not mean to be prejudiced," returned Honour.

"And sometimes in the summer and early autumn it really is pleasant," rejoined Gracieuse, nodding her little head to give emphasis to her words. "It is indeed."

"You evidently think you are generous in making the admission," said Honour, still smiling.

"I am afraid I do," she answered. "I try to like it just to please papa, but I cannot forget my lovely South."

"Madame wished very much to see your father, Mademoiselle," observed Monsieur. "This is his usual hour for being here."

"He was not well this morning, so I persuaded him to stop at home," Gracieuse explained. "He will be sorry to have missed Madame."

"I hope he is not seriously indisposed," Honour said.

"He suffers a great deal from neuralgia. Sometimes it settles near his heart, and that frightens me horribly," Gracieuse replied, her mobile features growing overcast as she spoke.

"It is a terrible pain," Honour said, "but I think not often dangerous. I suppose there is good medical advice to be had?"

"Oh, yes, and plenty of doctors at Rouen; but they do not seem able to do much for him."

"But when he is ill he must need you?"

"Manette is as good as gold—that is our servant—and very helpful," returned Gracieuse; "and the accounts must be kept in order."

"I think," said Honour, glancing toward Monsieur de Vieuxville, "that Mademoiselle ought to have help."

"No," broke in the girl, with a strange passion; "I don't want—I—"

She stopped suddenly, seeming to comprehend that both tone and manner were unwarrantable and strange. "I beg your pardon, Madame," she continued, in a softer voice. "In your goodness you meant to propose having another clerk. Please don't,

for papa's sake. It would make him think he was past duty—was failing. Oh, it would kill him! Please don't! I can do his work. Monsieur will tell you that I am quite capable. I am very strong; I never need rest. Please, Madame, please!"

Her tones had grown sharp and excited. She stretched out both hands toward Honour with a gesture of Southern passion, looked at De Vieuxville as if entreating him to plead for her.

Honour was greatly touched by the girl's distress, and hastened to reassure her.

"You misunderstood me entirely, Mademoiselle," she said, kindly. "So long as your father wishes to continue at his post, I shall be glad of his services. What I meant was that I feared too much came upon you, and that as the business is increasing another person ought to be employed."

"Indeed, indeed it is not necessary!" Gracieuse exclaimed. "Papa would be sure to think it was done because he was failing, or had been unpunctual. Monsieur can tell you that we get through all the work in time—that it is well done."

"I need no assurances to make one certain of that, my child," returned Honour. As she

spoke, her eyes chanced to fall on De Vieuxville. He was watching Gracieuse, and the expression of his face puzzled and angered Mrs. Pemberton. It was a look of vexation, annoyance—a kind of distrust, as if, so far from being touched by her emotion, he regarded it as partially acting.

Honour turned her eyes quickly away. Gracieuse was speaking again.

"You are very good, Madame! And you will not let papa be pained by seeing a younger man put here?"

"Certainly not. But you must promise me not to confine yourself too closely—you must have exercise and relaxation," Honour replied.

Then Monsieur's cold, aggravatingly musical voice said,—

"Mademoiselle is not so busy that she is obliged to neglect her health."

Gracieuse's cheeks flushed scarlet, her eyes flashed through their tears.

"At least, no one can say I neglect my duties," she exclaimed, angrily.

"Quite the contrary," returned Monsieur, with the same aggravating composure, which irritated Honour as sorely as it had Gracieuse. He received a fiery glance from a second pair of feminine eyes. The only sign by which

Honour could suppose he noticed their waste of indignation was a half smile, as a man might smile at the pettishness of two spoiled children.

"You will tell your father how anxious I am to make his acquaintance, will you not?" continued Honour, as soon as she could trust her voice not to display the thrill of anger caused by that stony man's manner. He *was* a stone—an icicle—only capable, she thought, of appreciating emotion just enough to be frigidly entertained thereby. "I used to hear so much about him from my uncle, that I seem to know him already."

"How good you are!" cried Gracieuse, seizing her hands, and pressing her lips on them with true Southern enthusiasm and fervour. The bit of impulse was so in keeping with her Southern appearance, that it did not seem strained or unusual.

"I hope you will like me, for I am too fond of roses not to have my heart won by such as these," Honour said, with her softest smile, touching the girl's glowing cheeks with her gloved fingers as she spoke.

Gracieuse brightened under the compliment, like a flower that the sun has suddenly shone across after it had been beaten down by

stormy weather. She gave De Vieuxville a look of saucy triumph, which made her face more irresistible than ever in its child-like *espiéglerie.*

"Madame is so good, that she means to like me!" cried Gracieuse.

"And you could not have a better or safer friend," he replied gravely.

Honour was inclined to rank this commendation as a fresh impertinence, only the wondrous courtesy of his manner at all times prevented her ever applying that word to the things which annoyed her on his part. She mentally substituted liberty for impertinence, but this did not answer either. By birth and breeding he had a right to be on terms of equality with any royal prince, and though she had only seen him twice, she knew in her soul that whatever wickedness he might be capable of, he would never be guilty of that vulgarest social sin, taking a liberty; it belonged to another cast of mind from his. But he was icy and unimpressionable—yes, and arrogant! She would think that, at least, and it was a comfort to do so.

While she and Gracieuse exchanged their bit of enthusiasm and sentiment, she was sure he stood contemptuous of their folly. She

could not resist giving him a metaphorical pin-prick in return.

"Monsieur is amused at our feminine expansiveness," she said, laughing. "You must come and see me, my child, and we will be as gushing and Southern as we choose! I have lived so much in Italy, that northern skies and manners chill me as much as they do you."

After all, the pin-prick was somewhat undignified she discovered as soon as she had dealt it. Monsieur was bending over a book on the desk, and did not seem to hear; apparently he supposed he had nothing to do with their conversation, and wished to leave them entirely free.

"May I really come?" cried Gracieuse.

"I shall expect you, and I shall come to see your father. Do you live near here?"

"In that old house just at the turn of the road," Gracieuse said, pointing toward the window, through which Honour could distinguish the mansard roof of a quaint dwelling rising among a group of chestnut trees.

"I noticed it as I rode by; it is a pretty nest," she answered. "I shall say good-bye now: it is time I was at home. Be sure you

do not stop in this dull room all day; it is too lovely a morning to be shut up."

Monsieur might have found in this remark a reason for smiling which any business man would have decided legitimate since there was work to be done; but whatever he thought he kept hidden, and Honour, quite unconscious that she had not over-well sustained her character as *une femme d'affaires*, repeated her farewells to Gracieuse, and moved toward the door.

Monsieur was following her. She looked suddenly back. She caught sight of Gracieuse's arms raised toward De Vieuxville in passionate entreaty; saw him make a warning gesture. She walked on before either of them could perceive that they had been noticed. Her adieus to Monsieur, who accompanied her out to the front of the house, where Joseph was leading the horses up and down, were ceremonious and stately enough, in spite of her late talk about being half a Southerner in her love of enthusiasm and frank cordiality.

"Can I put you on your horse?" he asked.

"Thanks—I am used to Joseph's way of doing it," she replied; "I should be clumsy with any one else."

Joseph heard, and his ugly countenance

beamed; so Honour's speech afforded somebody satisfaction. As for Monsieur, he did not seem to think about the matter in any way.

As Honour was settling herself in the saddle, she remembered the bouquet Gracieuse had gathered for her. Somehow she did not wish to have it. She was attracted toward the girl. She pitied her profoundly, but she did not wish to take the flowers—they would remind her of De Vieuxville and of the two scenes she had witnessed.

Monsieur lifted his hat and wished her a pleasant ride, turning back to the house the instant she set off.

"I don't like it!" was Honour's thought as she galloped away. "There is a secret between them! She is only a child, poor little motherless thing. I must make her like me, make her trust me. Perhaps, after all, there was a reason for my coming here. I dislike that man. I wish he were a world away. Cold, cruel, unscrupulous—I know he is all that; I feel it! No mere prejudice would explain my sentiment toward him—it is intuition. O, Armand de Vieuxville, if I find I am right, take care; you will need all your craft, all your art to shield you! And whatever else I might pardon, I will never forgive unhappiness

brought upon that child. I will punish it, too, if it is too late for anything else to be done."

And in her excitement, Honour urged Queen on at such a mad pace, that sober-minded Joseph rode after in a state of alarm for the safety of both mistress and horse.

CHAPTER V.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Effie de Marsan came to the house that day, accompanied by her cousin. Effie appeared more charming than ever, and Honour's favourable opinion of Gerard Mayne was heightened by this second encounter. Monsieur de Marsan had not been able to come—Effie made his excuses in her most graceful way—he was *désolé* at having been prevented renewing his acquaintance with their friend.

"For we venture to consider you that," said Effie, "though we have known you so short a time."

"I hope you do," Honour replied, cordially.

"We have talked about you constantly," said Effie; "we have wondered often how we got on before we knew you, and rather think that, before that we must have missed you without knowing what was the matter."

"That sounds a little misty and transcenden-

tal," said Mayne, with his gay laugh; "but I believe it is true."

"I like to think so, at all events," returned Honour.

"Léon raves over you," pursued Effie; "you must let him paint your portrait. He is your devoted slave; but then he's such an awful flirt, that I have grown used to his mental infidelities."

She went on speaking of her husband in the sweetest, most wife-like manner. Mayne, fond of studying character, listened in quiet amusement, thinking of the scene he had witnessed between the married pair before Effie left home.

De Marsan had intended to come with them. As soon as Mayne saw his cousin's face, when she came downstairs, dressed to set out, and found her husband waiting as well as himself, he knew that for some reason Effie did not wish Léon's society on this particular morning.

"I am glad you are able to leave your work," said she, in her softest voice. "I did not think you could go, as I knew you had promised to finish that picture by a certain time."

"I usually keep my promises," he replied, quick to catch the sting under the sweetness.

"About pictures?" she said, with a faint note of interrogation in her tone.

"I might have known that if I left my work for an hour I should receive reproaches," said he.

"On the contrary; I am always persuading you to work less when you are tired, as you are now—you will never be moderate, and so you make yourself ill."

"Work never made me ill," said he, with palpable emphasis on the first word.

"Yet you are always talking about how much you are obliged to do."

"Because I work very hard."

"Other men work. Please don't be disagreeable, Léon! I was so glad when I saw you ready to go—I hoped we might have a nice morning—of course, as usual, you will spoil it by giving way to your temper. I cannot satisfy you; I am tired of trying."

She sat down in the nearest chair, and sighed wearily.

"I see you want to put me in a passion," he said, with an effort at self-restraint.

"I want to! I, who would rather die than have a scene—especially before a third person; only I do not mind Gerard so much, for you long ago flung off all disguises in his society."

"For some reason you want me to stay at home," cried De Marsan, angrily; "I will—go by yourself."

"Ah me!" sighed Effie.

"Your artifices do not impose on me," continued her husband.

"Never mind, Gerard," said Effie, for the young man had risen as if to leave them; "Monsieur means to shriek and swear, I suppose, but do not let the tempest disturb you."

De Marsan darted one furious glance at her, and strode out of the room.

"He is satisfied now," said Effie; "he has destroyed my pleasure for the whole morning."

"He is ill and suffering, I am sure."

"Yes; I know that; but he makes himself so half the time, just by giving way to excitement over every trifle."

There were seasons when De Marsan suffered horribly from an internal disease, for which there was little hope of his ever finding a radical cure. In certain ways his nervous system was so affected, that any mental shock —anger, grief—brought on an attack, or aggravated an incipient one to a fearful extent. Effie knew this. Did the knowledge make her pause when she had an end of her own to serve? God pardon her—never! Once that

she saw him in the spasm she was goodness itself—helpful, too, as few women could have been.

But half an hour after his recovery she would have gone downstairs to resume or begin a flirtation, taking care to find plausible reasons; for she cared more about standing well in her own eyes than in those of others, much as she craved the good opinion of her kind.

So, while Effie talked poetry about her husband for Honour Pemberton's benefit, Mayne listened and wondered what earthly reason she could have had for wishing him to stop at home. He was on excellent terms with both—they were both very fond of him—and he never meddled in their quarrels except when he could throw oil on the troubled waters.

Later, while Mayne was playing agreeable to Mrs. Somers—his manners with elderly people were charming—his cousin and Honour exchanged opinions about him.

"I am so glad he has impressed you favourably," Effie said; "he is one of my boys, and I am very fond of him."

Honour laughed at the idea of her friend's speaking as if she had seen the gentleman grow up, and Effie laughed too; still she was pleased at Honour's thinking that impossible—

she hid it well, but to be considered young was one of Effie's pet weaknesses.

How old was she? Honour caught herself wondering. This morning she did not look a day over twenty-six. Her appearance varied greatly according to her mood or her health; but Honour had never met a woman concerning whose age it was so difficult to hazard a conclusion. Her skill in dress amounted to positive genius. She was not extravagant, and De Marsan was far from rich; yet, wherever she went, even among women who spent thousands of Louis-d'ors where she did hundreds of francs, Effie was always noticeably well attired. Her powers of conversation were wonderfully good; she talked in a slow, *trainante* voice, which would have been rather thin and sharp but for the care she took in her enunciation.

Honour asked Effie to go and see the apartments she had selected, and the two sat down in the turret boudoir to talk for a few minutes. A portrait of some one of Monsieur de Vieuxville's ancestresses which hung in the room—a portrait with eyes that resembled his—brought his name into the conversation.

"How do you like him?" Madame de Marsan asked.

"How can I judge so soon? I cannot be expected to know him yet," returned Honour, evasively.

"All of which decorous speech means you do not fancy him a bit," laughed Effie.

"I am afraid that I was prejudiced against him in advance," said Honour. "Try as hard as one may to be fair, it is difficult under such circumstances."

"It was partly my fault, I fear," said Effie. "I remember telling you all sorts of things against him—my dear, I have learned that not one of them was true."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I did not know him then—I must tell you, *en passant*, that we do not get on at all, so it is rather nice of me to speak in his favour."

"I fancy I should never get on with him either," returned Honour, "so your explanation is wasted."

"No; let us give even what you call him (I'll not say an ugly word!) his due. Now let me set Monsieur de Vieuxville straight in your mind."

"So be it," smiled Honour, though she was conscious that the task might prove more difficult than her companion supposed.

"My dear, it was not he I meant—so it

seems! I had not seen him! You know this place of ours had only just come to Léon. We had not been here when we saw you in Rome."

"Yes; well?"

"Well, I confused the identities—do you understamd? mistook him for his own father," said Effie. "The stories were all true, but it was the old man who played hero therein."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly! Any of the people in the neighbourhood—the Hautevilles or any of them (by the way they are all crazy to know you)—would tell you the same. He was a fearful *mauvais sujet*, *Monsieur le père*, and I put all his sins on the head of his son, who seems, according to rumour, to be the most staid and correct personage imaginable."

"I am glad to hear it," said Honour.

"You don't say it as if you were!" laughed Effie. "Confess, that, woman-like, you are disappointed to give him credit for steadiness after regarding him as fascinating and dangerous."

"The men who come under that type are not interesting to me," returned Honour.

"And I hope not to me—I was only speaking in jest," said Effie. "Only I do think

women have a certain curiosity about wickedness."

"It is said often," replied Honour. "I must avow that I have no sympathy with the excuse."

"At all events, it was the papa who played the gay Lothario to such an extent. His wife was an angel—naughty men's wives always are, by the way—extremes meet. Into the bargain, if a woman has latent facilities for being developed into a martyr, it would be a pity not to have them brought out."

Honour scarcely noticed the flippant words. She was remembering the expression of Armand de Vieuxville's face the night he showed her his mother's picture. She recollected, too, her asking him why he had not hung the portraits of the husband and wife side by side, and the chill which her question had cast over his spirits.

"I think his never using his title is an affectation," Effie went on, "but Léon says it was very sensible to drop it since he had no fortune in keeping with its stateliness. It has a very pretty sound—Marchioness de Vieuxville would look well on a visiting-card!—I wonder some woman has not bought the right to have it engraved on hers."

Then they began talking of some mutual friends, and forgot all about the gentleman they had been discussing. Before long they went downstairs and joined Mrs. Somers and Mayne. After a brief conversation, Effie insisted upon running away.

"Did you say you wanted me to drive you into Vieuxville?" she asked her cousin, as they took their seats in the carriage.

"I don't remember saying so, but I want to go there to-day. I must see a man who is coming up from Rouen."

"Then how will you get home? My patience will not stretch to the limit of waiting for you to hold a business interview."

"I can walk back."

"Or when I get home I will have your horse sent over."

"That will be better still."

"Now, why does she want to go to Vieuxville?" thought Mayne. "She has some reason—I had not mentioned the place. I shall probably find out why my lady wished to keep her lord and master safe in his studio." He laughed outright.

"I have no doubt it is very amusing," said Effie, laughing just from sympathy; "but I do not know what the joke is—as old aunty used

to say, 'I understand you perfectly, but I don't know what you mean.'"

Mayne had no mind to risk offending his cousin by any expression of his secret colloquy.

"I was thinking of that droll old bird, Mrs. Somers," he answered; and the response was not exactly a fib, for, with that faculty he had of indulging in half-a-dozen different trains of thought at the same time, he had been recalling some of her peculiar speeches even while occupied with wonderment as to Effie's reasons for avoiding De Marsan's society during the drive.

"I am sure she has been a robin in some previous stage of existence," said Effie. "She moves exactly like one—a hop, a skip, then a stop, as if with some undefined intention of hunting for stray crumbs."

"That just expresses it," laughed he. "I shall carry a roll in my pocket next time I go to the house, and throw bits in her way, to see if the bird instinct is strong enough to make her stoop for them."

The two cousins were sympathetic companions, and as fond of each other as if they had been brother and sister. They began talking all sorts of nonsense, saying things which would make prudish people's hair stand

on end to hear, and laughing like a pair of children. Effie was in such wonderful spirits that Mayne knew she was certain that her plan, whatever it might be, could not fail to succeed.

As they passed the sugar factory, Monsieur de Vieuxville was standing on the steps of the counting-house, talking with one of the foremen. He raised his hat in a fashion more ceremonious than cordial.

"That man dislikes me," thought Effie, but she would not have admitted so uncomplimentary a suspicion even to Mayne. It irritated her, not only because it was galling to have any masculine insensible to her fascinations, but she knew that De Vieuxville was clever and talked well, and Effie appreciated clever men and craved their society, though she could interest herself in the shallowest boy when no better game offered itself.

Mayne got out of the carriage at the *auberge*.

"Are you going immediately home?" he asked, carelessly.

"Yes. Oh, I remember! Now I am here, I may as well drive on to the station; there ought to be a package of books there for me."

He bade her adieu, without showing the least doubt of her determination being the impulse of the moment, though he could have sworn that the railway-station had been the real bourne of her drive this morning. She could return home without passing through the village, and if his suspicion of what took her to the *gare* was correct, she would do so, and he should not see her, but he meant to find out if he was right, just for his own satisfaction. He had a fondness for getting to the bottom of people's plots. Effie's artifices especially interested him, they were usually so masterly in their conception and carrying out. A move that she had planned for days would be made to appear the chance adventure of the moment, in a way which Mayne could heartily admire, but never, in his masculine awkwardness, hope to imitate.

He went into the *auberge*. There appeared to be no person with whom he had any business, nor did he ask if any one had been inquiring for him. He chatted awhile with the good-natured old *aubergiste* and her pretty daughter, and drank a glass of home-made liqueur for the good of the house.

In about half-an-hour the omnibus came rumbling up the ill-paved street. Mayne

bade the two women good morning, and went out. The omnibus was empty—a single portmanteau decorated the top.

"Good day, Antoine," Mayne called to the driver. "You do not seem to have been well repaid for your journey. There were no arrivals this morning, eh?"

"Only one,—Monsieur de Chantal," replied Antoine.

"And where is he?"

"Madame de Marsan happened to be at the station about a package of books, and she took Monsieur in the carriage."

"Ah; I hope the books were there?"

"No, Monsieur; I looked myself. Madame was quite annoyed, and said she should telegraph to Paris."

Mayne nodded, and went on up the street. Effie's sudden resolve to go in search of the package was explained.

Usually nothing save extreme physical pain prevented Léon de Marsan's settling to work when work was to be done; but this morning, after that scene with his wife, those morbid thoughts and dark suspicions which had haunted him of late, with a venom no jealous trouble had ever before caused, rendered painting out of the question. He perceived that he was

only doing harm to the nearly-finished picture, and finally threw down his brush in a sort of angry despair.

For a while he walked up and down the room, puffing vigorously at his pipe, then tried to write a letter, but tore it up, discovering that he had not written a word he meant to say. He seated himself with a book; at the end of an hour became conscious that he was still diligently reading the page at which he had chanced to open when he first took the volume in his hand, and he flung it impatiently aside.

There he sat staring at his picture—he had thought so hopefully of it only a few days previous, and now it looked such a wretched daub to his weary eyes that he was sorely tempted to blot out every trace of his long and patient handiwork. His gaze wandered about the pretty room, and each object roused some freshly dismal fancy or remembrance. While the fitting up of the studio was going on there had chanced to be a season of peace between him and Effie. She had been interested in the arrangements, and he had allowed her to gratify her taste by making it as charming as one's *beau idéal* of the haunt befitting a painter or a poet.

In the window nearest the fire-place was a writing-table, which Effie had said was to be for her special use. She should sit there of a morning—if she had no letters to occupy her, she would work or read to him—it would be like the old days in Rome. He had himself sent to Paris for a table and easy chair—lavishing a sum on them he would never have dreamed of spending for his own personal gratification. He chose a marvellous old affair, which was a cabinet and desk, and had a history dating, as Effie liked histories to date, back to the days of Louis XIV., when that monarch and his court were alike young and reckless. He had added a luxurious couch, with one end shaped like a *fauteuil*, but so long that she could lie at full length among the cushions when she had one of her languid mornings.

They were to have been so happy in this room! He was to have worked not only so well, but so easily—she was charmed with the subject for the new picture—had chosen it herself from among his sketches.

The sunshine lasted for three weeks, then disappeared in the most threatening cloud which had ever obscured their domestic horizon, stormy as it had often been.

De Marsan sat there this morning till the

room and its memories became intolerable. He positively hated the place for the time, and with a morbid exaggeration which had grown natural to him—at least the feeling would have been termed such by frigid, steady-going people, to whom self-restraint comes easy, because they have no strong emotions to subdue—wished that it might burn to the ground, and consume every relic of his work in the ruin.

Body and soul wear out rapidly beneath the feverish excitement such as consumed Léon de Marsan. There are troubles which bring a species of calmness with them—if only the composure of despair—but that is when there is no longer space for hope or fear; when both have yielded to certainty; when the thunderbolt has actually fallen at last.

Léon rang the bell and ordered his horse; he could no longer endure himself or his own reflections. Very soon he was galloping off through the pleasant sunshine.

The ride did him good, changed the current of his thoughts; he was so susceptibly organized that variations in the weather had a marked effect upon him.

He found himself at the junction of two roads; one led to Vieuxville, the other branched

off toward the railway-station. To the left was a bridle-path that wound up among the hills in the direction of the sea. He chose that, because he was certain to meet no one, and he was not in a mood for encountering acquaintances and having to listen to idle chatter.

He rode on up the path. He had pushed his horse hard, so at the first convenient point in the ascent he stopped to let L'Empereur breathe a little. De Marsan's kindness to animals went to an extreme which was growing fairly morbid, like his other feelings. Effie used to laugh, and declared that he would let a human being perish while he saved the dog who shared the human's danger, and would throw away the last jug of milk a poor family possessed, in order to preserve a fly that had fallen into it from drowning. Effie sometimes exaggerated a little, though it was true he did carry his sympathy for dumb creatures to an extreme which had its ludicrous as well as its pathetic side.

The place where he had checked his horse was edged by a fringe of saplings, which would have concealed him from the view of any person passing below, though he could look down both roads, to Vieuxville in one

direction, almost to the station along the other.

He heard the sound of wheels, and instinctively turned his head. He saw an open carriage coming up the road from the railway. Effie was seated in it, with a gentleman beside her. It only needed one glance to show De Marsan that the figure bending so deferentially toward his wife, while she talked earnestly, was not that of her cousin—he recognized Alphonse de Chantal.

De Marsan understood now why Effie had been so determined to keep him at home, that she was ready to made a quarrel (no, I am wrong, she never blundered like that)—why she was determined to tantalize him into an angry mood, so that he would refuse to go out, or else give utterance to harsh speeches, which would afford her an excuse for declining his society.

De Marsan sat gazing after them till the landeau disappeared round the turn of a third road, which led to De Chantal's home; then he rode on toward the sea.

CHAPTER VI.

IN HER GIRLHOOD.

It rained again the next day. Honour was inclined to think the bad weather came expressly as a trial to her patience; and having decided to regard it in the light of discipline, managed to endure the cross with sufficient equanimity.

She devoted herself to the writing of numerous letters which had burdened her conscience for some time, and, in the midst of her task, Léon de Marsan was announced.

"Never did obedience to duty meet with such reward!" cried Honour, as they shook hands; "and certainly no human creature was ever so welcome."

He sat a long time with her, and they talked on many subjects—of Monsieur de Vieuxville at last. Honour admitted that she had a prejudice against him, and De Marsan, who had known him for years, assured her that it was entirely undeserved.

"Whatever might arise, however appearances might be against him, I should trust the man," Léon said, and Honour knew that he would not speak such words lightly.

He told her a great deal about De Vieuxville's life, and when she was again alone she determined to put by her suspicions, or at least not to condemn her new acquaintance without real proofs. She felt that she had been ready to think ill of him, and was ashamed of her own lack of generosity.

She spent the evening playing *écarté* with Mrs. Somers—a penitential amusement, which left her slightly depressed. At last the old lady, overcome with drowsiness, went to her room, after nodding through a final game, and waxing mildly belligerent in her determination to confuse kings and knaves—winding up with a declaration that Honour was too sleepy to tell one card from another, and had twice nearly upset the lamp.

"I don't mention it to be disagreeable, my dear," said she, "but it gave me quite a turn, and I am sure once I heard a snore; but that may have been Sultan, so we will say nothing about it."

"The Sublime Porte looks too stately to have been guilty of such an indiscretion," re-

turned Honour, glad of an excuse to laugh, for during the last quarter of an hour Mrs. Somers had presented an aspect irresistibly comical between her dozes and gurglings and sudden wakings up for an instant to insist upon some preposterous play being a fixed rule of the game.

When her relative had departed, Honour sat by the fire gazing absently at the glowing embers until she discovered that she had lapsed into one of the aimless reveries against which she had meant to guard. She went to the piano and began to play fitful snatches of favourite melodies, singing a verse now and then in her rich contralto voice. But somehow the foolish tendency to reverie would haunt her even in the midst of this occupation. Then she tried to think about the business, and the good she meant to do—provided she could find anybody to whom she might be useful—and finally became conscience-stricken because her plans seemed to have self for an object after all.

Honour Pemberton was not an unhappy or a gloomy-minded woman. She certainly had no cause for unhappiness, and perfect health and strong digestive organs preserved her from the latter tendency. But in spite of the

numerous pleasant gifts which destiny had bestowed upon her—wealth, position, a more than reasonable proportion of good looks, and hosts of agreeable acquaintances—life of late had got a trick of occasionally appearing a little empty; though beyond the lack of a fixed important aim Honour could not have decided exactly what was wanting.

It is an odd thing to write about a woman five-and-twenty years old, but Honour had never been in love. Up to seventeen she was in a state of such complete subjugation to her mother—at once the most fascinating and tyrannical of her sex—that she could scarcely be said to have possessed an independent existence. Mrs. Nystrom had been an invalid and forced to live in comparative retirement. It was a necessity for her to spend her superabundant mental energies upon some object, and she devoted them to Honour. So complete was her ascendency over the girl, that Honour positively saw with her mother's eyes, and thought with borrowed opinions. Mrs. Nystrom would have been astonished indeed had it been proved to her that the child owned at bottom a strong will and latent capabilities for directing her own course. She lived and died without making the discovery, and until after her loss

Honour was as ignorant of the fact as her mother had been.

Mrs. Nystrom had settled theories upon every imaginable subject, but on none was she so determined as her views of love and marriage. Indeed, so far as the first pleasant experience was concerned, she denounced it as an utter absurdity—worse than that—an insanity. Love was something to be ranked with the measles, whooping-cough, and other childish diseases, only she believed that proper training would act as a sort of mental vaccination, and preserve any girl from catching the malady.

Her own marriage had been a love-match, and a terrible delusion it proved—except as to her suffering, that was real enough in all conscience, and never ceased for a moment till her husband ended his earthly pilgrimage by a duel. Her daughter was to be guarded against any approach to a fate like hers, so love and anything which might teach or talk of it—novels, poetry, or the society of frivolous girls—were carefully excluded from contact with Honour, who was brought up on such rigid Spartan principles, that had her mother been one whit less tender and bewitching than she was, the child's dormant will would have asserted itself just from her obstinacy being roused.

But no such blow to Mrs. Nystrom's plans arrived. When Honour was seventeen Mrs. Nystrom discovered that an internal malady, from which she had suffered for years, had suddenly made strides so rapid, that what earthly work remained for her to do must be accomplished without delay. She was still a youthful woman—only forty; but life had been so hard on her that I think after the first shock was over and her quick-acting mind had arranged her daughter's future, the idea of going out of this mortal stage of existence was pleasant to her. Die, until she had settled every duty or desire, from Honour's destiny to the hymn that was to be sung at her own funeral, she could not and would not—though she did not phrase the determination in so heathenish a fashion as I have done. She only said that strength would be given her to fulfil her tasks; she prayed over them too, and was beautifully unconscious of the fact that she rather threatened God with having to bear the onus if a jot or tittle of her projects went astray.

Providing for her daughter's future of course meant finding her a husband. Mrs. Nystrom believed in marriage, though the word "love" found no place in her vocabulary. Marriage included respect, esteem, a fortune on the man's

side, sterling worth too, and on the wife's implicit obedience to her husband—that is, from a woman like Honour, who was meant for a human ivy, and would always need a strong support.

The husband was ready found, though until Mrs. Nystrom opened his eyes he had no more dreamed of every marrying the girl than she had of marrying him. Arthur Pemberton was past fifty; very rich; an honest man, though a politician; true as steel and with a heart of gold. He had never married, for the best or the poorest reason in the world—according as you view the matter. He had loved in early manhood, and he loved the same woman still. That woman was Honour's mother. She never had loved him, but she trusted him, and from the time Honour was ten had brought her up with the intention of making her Arthur Pemberton's wife.

The certainty that her death-knell had sounded and the season for Mr. Pemberton's annual visit at her house came together. A less religious person than Mrs. Nystrom might have regarded this as a happy omen, but Mrs. Nystrom went further—she considered that Providence, knowing she could not err, had shown a laudable desire to aid her as much as possible in carrying out her plan—though,

weak as she was, she should have done so in any case.

She proposed for her daughter to Mr. Pemberton; he had never refused her anything, and he could not refuse her dying request. She proposed for Mr. Pemberton to Honour; and Honour, who had never dreamed of disputing her mother's will, did not dispute it now. I suppose that, beyond a certain feeling of awe, no girl was ever hurried on toward matrimony with so little real reflection of one kind or another.

Two months later the pair were married, at ten o'clock in the morning, and set off on a wedding tour which was to last a week. It had been agreed between Mrs. Nystrom and her son-in-law that Honour was to come back to her old home, and remain—

"As—as long as you need her," Mr. Pemberton said, hesitating, naturally enough, over the framing of his sentence.

"Till I die," amended the resolute woman, coldly rejecting his halting euphemism; "and that will be in about six weeks." Then her face softened suddenly; she stretched out her hand and grasped his, adding,—"You have been very good to me, Arthur—God bless you! There are many things I shall tell you

in the next world which I never have in this; take care of my girl."

And if the acceptance of Mrs. Nystrom's wishes had involved a certain degree of sacrifice on Arthur Pemberton's part,—for Honour was to him a mere child, whom he thought better fitted to be his ward than his wife,—those words repaid him amply. He knew he should always believe that in the life beyond this Agnes Nystrom would tell him that in spite of her obduracy here his patient affection had touched her heart.

So at ten o'clock of as lovely a May morning as ever dawned, Arthur Pemberton and Honour were married, the ceremony taking place in the house because Mrs. Nystrom had been for weeks unable to leave her room. At eleven the husband and wife departed; at seven o'clock in the evening they reached the station near which Mr. Pemberton's country house was situated.

The day passed pleasantly enough to Honour. At first she felt a little confused and shy, but presently some acquaintances of Mr. Pemberton's entered the train, and he had talked politics with the gentlemen, and the bride had been petted and made much of by a nice old lady, who, after the habit of nice old

ladies, offered her a great deal of advice, which might have been delivered in Sanskrit for all that Honour comprehended of its meaning.

They bade farewell to their companions, entered the carriage waiting for them, and drove away.

"My child, you look tired," he said, suddenly rousing himself from a sort of doze, and patting her hand in the fatherly fashion he had been wont to do when she was a little girl.

Before she could answer his head sank back against the side of the carriage. She thought he had fainted, and, though sorely frightened, was able to conduct herself sensibly, when two or three minutes after they reached their destination.

Arthur Pemberton was lifted out of the vehicle, carried into the house, and laid upon a bed. It was not a fainting-fit; he had been stricken with paralysis.

The verdict of the physician of the neighbourhood was confirmed by that of the practitioners who arrived the next morning from New York. Mr. Pemberton was in no immediate danger of death; in a day or two at furthest he would recover his senses, perhaps

be able to speak. Would he recover? The physicians looked at one another, and looked pityingly back at the young wife, who was struggling so bravely for composure in this first trouble of her life. They gave her as much hope as their consciences would permit, but even in her experience she comprehended that there was little probability of Mr. Pemberton's ever rising from that bed.

Forced for the first time to act upon her own responsibility, the dormant energies of Honour's nature showed themselves in a way which would have surprised her even more than they could have done anybody else had she found time to think. She had taken the management of the sick man from the moment they entered the house, soothed the frightened servants, who loved their master dearly, and given her orders as collectively as if she had been in the habit of giving orders.

Her very misery and terror only showed themselves in a cold, repressed manner, which made her appear years older than she was. She did not write to her mother. Though not aware of the extent of Mrs. Nystrom's illness, she knew that any sudden shock would be dangerous. She simply telegraphed in Mr. Pemberton's name that they had arrived.

Two days later the sick man recovered consciousness, though he could not move hand or foot, or articulate beyond a few broken words uttered in a hoarse whisper. But Honour could understand every syllable, even when his murmurings were unintelligible to the professional nurse who had been summoned to share the watch. They were words of sympathy, attempts at comfort for her.

The next morning there came a telegram for Mr. Pemberton. Still acting from that new force and decision which had come to her in her need, Honour unhesitatingly opened it. The doctors had told her that her husband must be kept free from agitation. She opened and read the despatch. Her mother was dying; if the daughter hoped to see her alive, she must start at once.

The physician chanced to be in the house at the time. She told him the state of the case, still in that same quiet, almost apathetic way. Mr. Pemberton could safely be left; there would be no change for weeks. When the matter was explained to him, he signified his desire that Honour should go. She reached her old home that night. She feared the account which she had written of Mr. Pemberton's illness might have injured her mother,

but Mrs. Nystrom knew nothing about the arrival of the letter.

She died at daybreak, able toward the last to talk a little, to declare that she could go in peace, because she left her child safe under the protection of a good, true man. She had been perfectly satisfied with Honour's vague report that indisposition had detained her husband.

The physical agony which she had endured for hours ceased quite suddenly; she said her prayers, recommended Honour to be as dutiful a wife as she had been daughter, gathered up her feet in bed, like Jacob when "he had made an end of commanding his sons," and so departed.

Often afterward, in looking back over that season of anguish, Honour wondered she had not died too. The very suddenness of the blows which fell so unexpectedly upon her probably to a certain extent dulled her suffering, though she suffered enough, God knows. The awful newness and strangeness of her life was utterly bewildering, for from the first she could comprehend, young as she was, how completely she must depend upon herself, and not that alone, but be forced to act for others.

Mr. Pemberton lived for two years, but

though after the first six months his mind was clear and active as ever, he could not have been more helpless physically had his soul been imprisoned in some monumental stone effigy upon a tomb.

Honour devoted herself to him. She was eyes, hands, and ears to him. He learned to depend entirely upon her; his whole fortune was placed in her hands, and she directed its employment. He was a cultivated man, with an imaginative side to his nature, which rendered him fond of novels and poetry. Besides all the solid works she read aloud, Honour went through a course of fiction in several languages which would have horrified her mother when in the flesh, though I have faith to believe that her ideas had sufficiently widened in the sphere to which she had gone forward to enable her to understand that mental blossoms may be as grateful and good for the spirit as earthly flowers are pleasant to the physical senses.

At nineteen Honour was a widow. Mrs. Somers had been her companion for some months before Mr. Pemberton's death. Very soon after his release Honour and her relative sailed for Europe. This had been Mr. Pemberton's plan for her. Besides Mrs. Somers,

she had no living relation save the distant cousin who had lately left her his property in Normandy. He had been a misanthropic old bachelor, with no desire to have his domestic quiet invaded by women; so, though he used to visit her when she was in Paris, and even on several occasions strayed as far as Rome and Naples to enjoy her society, she had never seen his home, and was a good deal surprised when she found that not only had he bequeathed her his wealth, but expressly desired her to continue and take a personal interest in the business he left.

The Honour *he* knew was very unlike the Honour her mother had known—a self-contained, self-reliant woman of the world; gay affable, charming, but quick to resolve and act, and with a will like iron when once she had decided upon the fitness of a certain course.

And in all these years love had not—so much as a fancy—touched her heart, though naturally she had had suitors by the score from every Christian land under the sun. What young, handsome, rich widow ever lacked such? It seemed strange to Honour when she thought about the matter that she never had cared for any man—that is, in the sentimental, poetical, rather silly way (I am quoting my

heroine still, I beg you to believe), common enough to her sex. She concluded that her utter lack of susceptibility must, in a measure, have been the effect of early training. Her mother had nipped and pruned her girlish fancy so severely that no blossom of romance could open in that arid soil.

Sometimes she wondered would it have made a difference had any man approached her with a love so strong that she could not have helped feeling its strength and endurance —only that there was no such love in masculine nature outside of novels. Men had sworn that her obduracy would be their death; but she had seen them go on very comfortably in spite of it. They seemed to her, as a rule, to be in love a little with about six women at a time, and able to find sufficient happiness with the one of the six who might happen to be nearest, and when their brief-lived passion had worn out, either to make the woman unhappy by rushing off in search of fresh excitements, else to settle down into a half-grumbling, half-lazy acceptance of such gifts as Fate had offered, with a constant mental reservation that their merits deserved something much better.

Of course there must be exceptions to a rule so sweeping. Honour felt that she was very

generous in admitting this. She could not deny that she had seen happy marriages—marriages blessed by mutual affection and constancy. But this fact did not materially affect her opinions. It is seldom that proofs really change our theories. Yet love must, after all, be a very beautiful thing—a little foolish, perhaps; still, it was rather tiresome, however grand, always to be wise!

Honour was thinking this as she sat at the piano to-night, letting her hands stray idly over the keys while she gave rein to her fancies. Then she began to laugh at her own nonsensical thoughts; sighed after; and finally went off to bed, just to be rid of herself and her general state of idiocy.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

The next day happened to be the fête of some favourite Norman saint. Honour recollected that it was to be a holiday for the men at the Sugar Works, and she determined to take the opportunity of going to see Gracieuse Galais and her father. She had been reminded of the old gentleman by the mention of his name among certain papers of her cousin's which she was busy with in the morning.

Mrs. Somers had conceived the idea of going with Céline to witness some church-ceremony in a distant town, and would be absent nearly the whole day. So after breakfast Honour ordered out the pony-carriage. It was quite possible that she might be transgressing some rule of French etiquette in driving her basket-phaeton without the guard of elderly female protection; but if the magnates of the neighbourhood were shocked, they must set it down to the score of her American ignorance of what

was fitting in a young woman. She enjoyed driving, and had no mind to give up the pleasure. Mrs. Somers saw fit to be as much afraid of the beautiful little silver-grey ponies as if they had been a pair of unicorns, so she must usually go alone; therefore the sooner the neighbourhood became accustomed to this eccentricity on her part the better. Honour had not the weakness of many young persons of our generation of liking to run counter to established prejudices, but she was fond of her freedom, and in sundry unimportant matters, which, after all, had a great deal to do with her comfort, calmly took her own way, and wherever she might be people put up with it.

So to-day she had the ponies brought out, to Joseph's huge delight; for there was nothing he liked so much as to sit perched up in the rear of the pretty basket, and watch the admirable manner in which his mistress conducted the graceful little animals, that were almost as fleet of foot as a pair of reindeer.

As she passed through the straggling hamlet where the workmen lived, Honour found the entire population enjoying their holiday in the open air. She stopped to speak with the foreman—got out of the carriage, and took this opportunity to make acquaintance with a num-

ber of the labourers' wives and a host of bright-eyed, keen-visaged Norman babies, who looked like so many animated mummies in their swaddling clothes.

The cottages were clean and comfortable, and the people seemed contented and happy. The ancient curé who attended to their spiritual wants had already paid her a visit, and been charmed with her affable manners and evidently sincere desire to aid his flock in any manner possible; but, as Honour walked about among them this morning, she could not help feeling she was as far as ever from having found active work.

She drove on to Monsieur Galais's house.

As she walked up the path she saw the old gentleman seated at the open door busy with a book. He rose quickly, and came forward to meet her. He had the kindliest dark eyes ever set in a human being's head, and his whole face beamed with an expression of such goodness and contentment, that just to look at him Honour felt would be a rest and encouragement when one was troubled or misanthropic.

"Madame is too kind to come and see the old man," he said, taking the hand she extended between both his, and looking at her with a smile so paternal and kind that it fairly

seemed liked a blessing. "I was asking my little Gracieuse this morning if she did not think we might go and pay our respects."

"You see I could not wait any longer for you to do it," Honour answered. "I used to hear my uncle talk so much about you, that I seemed to know you already; as for your pretty Gracieuse, I saw her the other day, and she completely stole my heart."

He raised her hand to his lips with a quaint, old-world gallantry, which was positively exquisite, and the pair were friends from that moment. The sun was so bright and warm, that Honour preferred sitting out on the pavement which extended between the lawn and the house to going in-doors; and Monsieur Galais, having decided that there could be no *courant d'air* to endanger her health—Frenchman-like, *courants d'air* were his special dread and nightmare—he allowed her to sit down on a bench placed beneath one of the windows, and seated himself beside her.

"I interrupted your reading," she said, glancing at the book he still unconsciously held under his arm. "What is it? You seemed as deeply engrossed in it as a young lady could be in a novel."

He put it in her hand with a pleasant laugh

—it was a volume of Horace, worn by time and much perusal.

"I am afraid I have almost as great a weakness for novels as if I were a young lady," he said; "much greater than I should like my little Gracieuse to know."

"I am sure Horace is your favourite poet," returned Honour.

"Yes; I think he must be of any old man, and I have been that a good many years now. Only think, I am seventy-three, and yet it does not seem so very long since I was a schoolboy, and regarded this book as a task instead of a pleasure."

"I should not have supposed you were anywhere near that," she said.

"Seventy-three, dear Madame, and my little Gracieuse is only eighteen. Ah, it is a rash thing to sow flowers late in the autumn—God knows—He will take care of her!"

He left his sentence unfinished; but Honour comprehended his meaning—the doubt in regard to his child's future, when he should be taken away. She laid her hand impulsively upon his arm; before she could speak, he added,—

"But the good God knows—He will take care of her," and though his voice trembled

a little, the patient, hopeful smile was on his lips still.

"My uncle was your warm friend," Honour said; "I mean, if you will permit me, to inherit that friendship. These are early days to speak of such things; but you may be sure that while I live your pretty flower shall run no risk of being chilled by the frost."

"That is good—that is right," he answered gratefully. "The little girl has grown up very helpful and self-reliant; but if I were to go suddenly—and at my age one may be called any moment—she would be young to leave alone. I have a plan that I hope to see carried out—she knows nothing of it yet—you see I take you at your word, dear Madame, and talk to you as I should to the kind relative if he were here."

"Tell me," Honour said; "you may always be certain that whatever concerns you or Gracieuse is of interest to me, and I shall come to you whenever I want advice or am in difficulty. The very last letter my cousin wrote me was to bid me do this; he said that in his whole life he had never known so good a man as you."

"Our acquaintance began when I was in great trouble," Monsieur Galais replied. "It

was just after my little wife died. I could not bear to stay in Arles where we had been living, so I left Gracieuse—she was a child then—with some relatives of her mother's, and came back to Normandy. I met your uncle here, and he gave me the place that I have kept ever since."

"And where you will so seldom allow yourself any rest, however much you may need it! You see I know all about your little wickednesses," returned Honour.

"Indeed, I have been quite lazy lately," he said. "The truth is, I am not so strong as usual this spring. I say it as if there was something surprising in the fact that each spring should find me less so," he added, with a smile. "It puts more work on Gracieuse; but she will not have me worried with a clerk, and I take care she is not confined too many hours at a time."

"All the same, if I were you, I would have Monsieur de Vieuxville find me a clerk," said Honour.

"No, no, not yet," he replied. "It would break Gracieuse's heart. Either she would think Monsieur was not satisfied with her, else get it into her head that I must be very ill. Thanks a thousand times; but for the present,

dear Madame, we will leave matters just as they are, if you will permit me to advise."

"Of course it is for you to decide, since the matter concerns you more than anybody else. Monsieur de Vieuxville tells me that your daughter is a wonderful accountant, so, naturally, he is only too well pleased to let things remain unchanged."

"If Gracieuse should leave me—"

"How leave you?"

Monsieur Galais laughed quite heartily.

"Your uncle used to tell me you were different from women in general," said he. "I think nine ladies out of ten would not have asked that question. If Gracieuse should marry—"

"Ah!" said Honour in rapid parenthesis. "Is she engaged?" She did not stop to think why, but she knew she should be glad for the girl's sake to hear an answer in the affirmative.

"It was just about that I was going to speak when I wandered off to myself," said Monsieur Galais. "No, no—not engaged. I wanted to talk to you about my plan for her; but if I bore you too much this time you will never come again."

"I shall not go until you tell me," said

Honour. "By the way, where is that pretty blossom?"

"In the counting-house. She had some letters to write to her mother's family, and went over because she had left her papers there."

"I will go presently and give her a lecture for remaining shut up such a fine day," said Honour; "but first tell me what you have planned for her—a marriage, of course—I am woman enough to understand that."

"On my side Gracieuse has no relatives, except a cousin who has lived in England for years; on her mother's the female relatives are all old people like me. There is a distant cousin—a doctor in Bayonne—Doctor Jean Chegary. A good man, well-to-do in the world. He knows Gracieuse, he wants to marry her—"

"Does she like him?"

"As a cousin."

"That is quite enough," said Honour, answering in accordance with her creed; and Monsieur Galais was too thorough a Frenchman to be surprised at the response. But Frenchman though he was, he had ideas that in certain ways a young girl's fancies should be consulted in so important a matter.

"If she can like him it will be a great comfort to me," he said. "Jean is to make me a visit soon; she has not seen him for several years."

"Is he young?"

"Thirty-seven or eight."

"Just the age at which a man ought to marry."

"And a good man and a clever."

"Then in Heaven's name why should she not like him? But I thought only one rule prevailed in France—for the parent to choose and the daughter to accept."

Monsieur Galais shrugged his shoulders.

"I am afraid that I have a good deal spoiled my Gracieuse. She was all I had to pet," he added, deprecatingly; "and it is so nice to spoil somebody! But when she does marry she will not go quite empty-handed to her husband. Last year a relative left me thirty thousand francs, which will make her a comfortable little *dot*."

"My uncle was so fond of her, that I wonder she was not mentioned in his will," observed Honour, just thinking aloud, without remembering that her listener was Gracieuse's father.

"He once spoke of it," the old man answered, with equal simplicity; "but I dare say

after I came into that little inheritance he did not think it necessary—and, indeed, it was not."

Presently the old gentleman began speaking of Monsieur de Vieuxville, and was even more enthusiastic than De Marsan had been. Honour listened, glad to be confirmed in her idea that she had done the Marquis injustice. She would rather at any time blame herself as suspicious and hasty than think evil of another.

They sat conversing for nearly an hour, and Honour was only reminded of the length of time she had been there by seeing De Vieuxville appear at the gate. She made her adieus at once, exacting a promise from Monsieur Galais that he would come very soon to visit her.

She met the manager as she walked down the path, and somewhat to his surprise gave him a warmer greeting than he had ever received from her. For the first time she offered him her hand; and anybody who knew Honour well would have known that with her this sign of friendliness was no idle compliment.

De Vieuxville turned back to open the gate for her, and they stood there for several moments talking gaily enough. Then Honour moved on, saying,—

"I am going to visit Mademoiselle Gracieuse. That musty old counting-house has such a mysterious attraction for her, that she cannot forsake it even on a holiday."

"How mysterious?" he asked, rather quickly.

"Perhaps the word was not applicable, but you know ill-natured people say women are never exact," returned she, laughing. "But I must go now—no, don't come with me, I want to get really acquainted with the little girl. What a charming old man the father is."

They exchanged farewells, and Honour passed on, wondering somewhat that Monsieur de Vieuxville should have been so dull as not to perceive that she had used the word mysterious in jest.

"But I do not think he understands jesting," she said to herself. "He looked as startled as if I had accused Mademoiselle of some deep-laid plot against the widow or orphan. However, I am glad to lay by my prejudices against him! He is not even half so stately or conceited as I fancied, but one of your reserved, reticent men. I wonder if he is so by nature or only from habit, and because life has been a little hard on him."

By this time she had reached the counting-house, and forgot Monsieur de Vieuxville and

his peculiarities. The window was open. Honour pushed back the screen of red and white roses which hung before it, and looked in. Gracieuse was seated at her desk, her back toward the window. An open ledger lay before her, and she was writing so busily that Honour's approach did not rouse her.

"You are a very naughty girl to be working on a holiday," that lady called gaily.

Gracieuse started up so suddenly that she sent some loose papers fluttering over the floor, and turned toward the window a face from which every tint of colour had faded.

"I frightened you," Honour said; "I ought not to have spoken so suddenly. But oh, what business has a young thing like you to be so nervous?"

"I—I beg your pardon! It was very silly of me," returned Gracieuse, still hesitating in the middle of the room.

"It is just because you stay shut up so much," continued Honour. "Put away those tiresome ledgers and come out into the sunshine."

"I—I was only writing letters," Gracieuse answered; "I laid my paper on the book for convenience."

By the time she finished her sentence she

had recovered her composure; the delicate pink tint came back to her cheeks, and she smiled a joyous welcome at her visitor.

"How good of you to come and see us, Madame," she said. "Papa will be so glad—but he is at the house."

"I have been sitting a long time with him—he told me I should find you here," replied Honour. "Make haste and put away your correspondence, my child, and get out of that gloomy place."

Gracieuse quickly gathered up the papers which had fallen on the floor, locked them in her desk, closed the ledger—talking all the while, but arranging everything with such careful precision that Honour smiled as she watched her rapid movements, amused at this old-maid-like passion for order, so different from the characteristics she would have decided the girl to possess.

"I begin to think I have no discernment whatever of character," thought Honour, as she walked away to a stone bench placed under the shadow of a chestnut tree and sat down.

In a moment Gracieuse ran out of the front doors of the counting-house and joined her.

"Your visit must have made papa so

happy," she said. "How good of you, Madame!"

"I was obliged to come in search of you since you did not come to me," replied Honour, looking at the pretty creature with admiring eyes, and thinking, in her fanciful way, that if there were any truth in the doctrine of transmigration of souls, Gracieuse had once been a fawn.

She was greatly attracted toward the child, and fully determined to brighten her rather dull, prosaic life in every way possible. To invite her among a set of idle fine people would be a mistaken kindness—she would only be neglected or else imbibe tastes which might render the comfortable, safe *bourgeois* future which lay before her unacceptable by contrast. But there were many things which could be done to give colouring and brightness to her youth, and Honour was not a woman to omit their doing.

She had a singular talent for making people talk freely to her. She was the recipient of the secrets of all her friends, and even reticent natures, with neither faculty nor desire for giving confidence or asking sympathy, surprised themselves often by the completeness and suddenness with which they yielded to her influence.

She found Gracieuse full of poetical fancies, with a child-like love of gaiety and fun. The girl had been much more carefully educated than usually happens with Frenchwomen, no matter what their class.

Monsieur Galais was a student, and had given himself the satisfaction of training Gracieuse's mind in the studies which a boy would have pursued.

The girl attracted Honour, as I said; and she felt that, gay and girlish as she appeared, it was a character worth studying—possessing capabilities and depths of which Gracieuse herself was probably as yet ignorant. She seemed perfectly satisfied with her monotonous life, and showed by many little things she said that tiresome as it would have appeared to most poetry-reading, romance-loving children of her age, she managed to make it full of bright, cheerful interest. That she adored her father was evident, and did not even consider there was any sacrifice in sharing his labours.

"I believe I am really fond of work," she said, laughing, "though Madame de Marsan once told me I was a little monstrosity for thinking so. Such a charming woman — she comes sometimes to see us, and papa says her visits brighten the

old counting-house like a bouquet of spring flowers."

"I am sure no one could help liking her," Honour replied.

Gracieuse nodded her graceful head like a bird.

"I think Monsieur de Vieuxville does not," she said.

"Why do you think that?"

"Indeed I hardly know—at least I could not put it into words—but I am sure he does not."

"Perhaps Monsieur is difficult to please," said Honour. Then becoming aware that her voice was rather disdainful, she added, "He seems very grave and serious, and she is exactly the contrary."

"It may be that," said Gracieuse. "Monsieur can be terribly severe when he pleases. I have known him all my life—he scolds me sometimes. I dare say it is for my good, but I don't think I like it." Honour laughed outright.

"Few people have a taste for medicine," said she. Suddenly she remembered there was a possibility of clearing up her last doubts in regard to this man, who seemed to have so thoroughly won the esteem of all about him.

"Had he been scolding you the day I first came to visit the factory?" she asked, abruptly.

"He had the night before," Gracieuse replied, without hesitation. "He found me crying out in the wood near the château. I was anxious about papa—vexed with him, too, because—because he had been talking about a marriage for me—or at least I knew that was what he meant."

"So Monsieur de Vieuxville lectured you," returned Honour, infinitely relieved by this simple explanation.

"Yes, and I ran away; but I think he did not repeat to papa the naughty things I said."

"Some time perhaps you will tell me about your father's plan—"

"Oh, it is only that he has taken the idea I ought to marry Jean Chegary, my cousin," returned Gracieuse. "I know Jean is coming here this summer—I shall settle it all with him—papa must not be bothered."

She said the words lightly, but her girlish face looked resolute enough. She did not pursue the subject, and their slight acquaintance would not permit Honour to offer advice or utter words of worldly wisdom.

"You like living in the South of France?" was all she said.

"If I could choose my company," answered Gracieuse, with a mischievous glance, like a mutinous child. "It must be very pleasant to travel. I went to England last year with a friend of papa's."

"And did you enjoy it?"

"Oh, so much," she replied, with the colour deepening in her cheeks; "I was very, very happy." She stopped, and began to laugh, perhaps afraid her enthusiasm would appear childish, for she added,—"Though it was rather foggy, I must admit. Do you like Normandy, Madame?"

"Yes; one could not fail to do that," Honour answered. "Besides, I feel it ought to become a sort of home to me now that I have interests and responsibilities here."

"Your uncle would be so glad. How fond he was of his great beetroot fields, and the tiresome sugar-making!"

"He often used to mention your father and you in his letters," Honour said. "I felt that I knew you both before coming here."

"He was always thoughtful and kind," Gracieuse replied; and, except that it was a fancy too foolish to indulge, her listener might

have believed there was an odd tremor of compunction in the voice. "It was all so sudden at the last! I am glad you have the place; you will love it and the people for his sake."

"Yes," returned Honour. Then she remembered what had been said by Monsieur Galais as to her uncle's intentions in regard to Gracieuse. "I think the will was hurriedly made. I fancy he would have added certain stipulations had more time been given him."

"I don't know. I never heard of—"

Her hesitation convinced Honour that the girl had felt some natural disappointment at the non-fulfilment of the expectations in which she had been led to indulge.

"I have not yet thoroughly examined his papers," continued Mrs. Pemberton. "Only the other day I came upon some memorandums I could not understand. I must find leisure to go over everything."

"Memorandums?"

"It may be that he intended to put a codicil, which he afterward forgot, he suffered so much. I should like to carry out every wish of his," Honour said, anxious, if possible, to make Gracieuse comprehend that it would only be necessary for her to speak

frankly in order to have any promise which might have been held out by the dead man gladly and quickly fulfilled. "I wish that so earnestly," she added; "I should be so glad if any of his friends could tell me of plans he might have spoken about."

"Yes," Gracieuse said, faintly.

"He was so methodical, that in the end I hope to discover everything," pursued Honour. "He even kept an account of his daily expenditures, down to the smallest item."

"He was very orderly," Gracieuse said, in the same low tone.

"And you liked him?" Honour asked, desirous to lead her to speak more freely than she seemed inclined to do.

"Very much; he and papa were great friends."

For the first time Honour noticed how weak her voice sounded. She looked closely at her, and perceived that her face looked strangely tired, and she had grown very pale, but she did not connect the change in her appearance with their conversation.

"You are tired to death!" she exclaimed. "I'll have that old counting-house burned down, if you shut yourself up there so constantly. Good-bye—just sit here for a while

and rest—you are not even equal to talking or being talked to."

Gracieuse attempted some feeble expostulation, but Honour would not listen. She kissed the girl affectionately, and hurried away.

Gracieuse sat looking after her till she was out of sight, then rose herself to go. Suddenly her features worked convulsively; her limbs tottered under her. She muttered some inarticulate words, sank slowly down upon the grass, and lay there for a long time, not insensible, but incapable of movement, staring up at the blue sky with a hopeless misery in her eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHOOSING MODELS.

Honour was fond of exploring new places, so just beyond Monsieur Galais's house she turned the ponies down a road which branched off to the left.

"It must lead somewhere," she observed to Joseph, glancing back over her shoulder at that important personage.

Joseph would, perhaps, have preferred a route which held a less vague hope of conducting them speedily to the château, for it was almost his dinner-hour; but his chivalrous instincts prevented his giving even mental utterance to any diatribes against his adored mistress's caprice. He did not so much as look cross—a marvellous bit of self-restraint on the part of any man, whatever his degree, in a matter which involved the postponement of that grave moment in human existence.

Presently they reached a point where affairs looked still less hopeful, for several other roads

thrust themselves forward to confuse Honour's mind by their separate claims to consideration. The route leading toward the sea she had already traversed on horseback, so she turned to the right, and dashed the silver-tailed ponies at the hill with a recklessness which is the peculiar attribute of feminine whips.

However, the ponies were like Joseph, always ready to approve of their mistress's conduct, and the tiny creatures whirled the light equipage along at a rate which might have contented Jehu himself.

A level sweep for a mile or two, then another hill; a house visible among the trees at the left, and by the open gate a gentleman standing, whom Honour recognized, and therefrom concluded that she had strayed near De Marsan's place.

She checked the ponies as Mayne lifted his hat and came forward.

"I hope your cousin is quite well?" Honour said, after they had exchanged salutations.

"Quite, and she will be delighted to see you," returned Mayne; "though I don't believe you were in search of her, or knew that you were near the house."

"That is only from the base suspicion natural to your sex," cried Honour. "Do you

mean me to drive over you in order to get in at the gates?"

"I thought they were a pair of rats when I saw them first," said he, laughing; "and fancied I was about to see Cinderella belated on her return from the ball. Shall I carry them up to the house for you?"

"You may get in if you like—perhaps they will punish your disrespect by running away before we get to the door."

But he declined to add his weight to the fairy chariot, walking on beside it up the short, steep avenue.

Madame de Marsan was seated on the terrace, arranging flowers in a couple of great vases. She had a basket of brilliant blossoms on a rustic table, and a very handsome young man to hand her the roses as she required them for her task.

She saw the carriage and its occupant, and immediately deserted both flowers and gentleman.

"I am so glad to see you!" she called. "I was thinking a little while ago if this beautiful day did not bring you I would never forgive you or it."

By this time the vehicle had come to a halt. Honour stepped out and the two ladies exchanged warm greetings.

"You need not thank her for coming—you owe the pleasure entirely to me," said Mayne.

"Does he mean that I have come to see him?" Honour asked.

"I should not be surprised; you know the proverbial modesty of the race," laughed Effie, "and no doubt Léon will ascribe the visit to his fascinations; but I am a humble creature, and glad to see you on any terms."

"The truth is, she did not intend to come at all," explained Mayne gaily. "She was dashing past at full speed when I suddenly started up before her like a ghost, and roused her conscience to the fact that she had not returned your visit."

"I do not believe a word of it," said Effie; "I prefer to think you came out on purpose to have *déjeûner* with us."

"I am not sure I meant to do that," returned Honour; "but you remind me that it is late, and I am hungry—but poor Joseph and the ponies!"

"Bless me, they shall be taken care of."

"You must find a mug and a teaspoon to feed the rats out of," interrupted Mayne. "Shall I get the canary-cage to put them in?"

"They are the most beautiful creatures I

ever beheld!" cried Effie. "My dear, if I can resist hating you for owning them, I'm fitter for heaven than I ever expected to be."

"If I should find myself in danger of going there soon, I'll leave them to you in my will," said Honour.

"Take care!" cried Mayne. "The promise is like a married man's getting an assurance on his life for his wife's benefit—only another name for a sufficient temptation to make her poison his tea."

"The cases are not parallel," said Effie; "the latter would be a virtuous action, and so its own reward."

"I am glad to get at a woman's idea of what a virtuous action really is," returned Mayne.

"I never heard that there was any idea whatever in such matters among men," said Honour.

"Nor anybody else," added Effie. "But the creature's nonsense makes me forget to be polite! Come here, Monsieur de Chantal, and let me present you to Madame Pemberton," she continued, in French. "Monsieur has one approach to a virtue—he does not attempt to speak English, it is usually such a dreadful failure on the part of his countrymen."

Monsieur de Chantal came forward, made his

most graceful bow, and said several pretty things with an ease quite wonderful at his age. Honour noticed that he was handsome, though of a style too effeminate to please her. He could not be more than two or three and twenty, and she was too young still to have any weakness or even much toleration for boys.

Madame de Marsan bade Joseph take the ponies to the stables and provide for their comfort, and then find his way to the kitchen in order that his own might be attended to.

"It is quite dreadful to inflict all my live stock upon you in this fashion on a first visit," said Honour.

"Quite!" retorted Effie. "I hope Mrs. Somers is well. Why did she not come with you?"

"You will still persist in believing this visit intentional," said Mayne.

"At all events, I don't appear with a huge dog ready to eat her up, after the pleasant fashion in which you endanger people's lives," laughed Honour. "My cousin has gone to some church-service with Céline, like the proper, well-regulated person she is! I wonder if it is indecorous in France for a lone female to go straying about the high roads with a pony-carriage?"

"Try and make people say so any way, for then it will be ever so much pleasanter to do it," said Effie. "Monsieur de Chantal's mamma at least will not be shocked, for I have already given her cause to exhaust her powers in that line."

The young Frenchman looked a little bewildered by their rapidly uttered nonsense, and began with such earnestness to declare it impossible for his mother to do anything but adore Madame and Madame's friend, that they all laughed.

"And like a good boy you are prepared to follow your mamma's lead," said Mayne.

De Chantal looked rather sulky at such classification of himself among adolescents, but Effie consoled him with a quick smile. Presently she nipped Mayne sweetly but severely, *à propos* to something else. Honour did not trace the punishment back to the real offence, but Mayne did, and treated his cousin to a sly glance, which showed her that he understood.

They went on into the breakfast-room—a pretty apartment at the back of the house—with a view of the sea in the distance, sparkling in the sun.

Monsieur de Marsan joined them here—

looking tired and worn, Honour thought, but delighted to see her.

"I stopped so long at your house yesterday," he said, "that I was afraid of hearing you were dead of boredom."

"Why, you did not tell me you had been," said Effie. "You never knew a man in your life, Mrs. Pemberton, so fond of small mysteries."

De Marsan turned toward Monsieur de Chantal, and gave him a cordial greeting.

"You did not make a long stay in Paris," he added. "I saw you driving back with my wife from the station the day before yesterday."

This was the first time Effie learned that her ruse had been discovered. She felt cross enough, but gave no sign, though De Chantal looked a little conscious, and hastened to say,—

"I was only there two days. I found time, however, to go to the Exposition. Your picture is admirably hung."

"It is decidedly the feature of the Salon," Honour observed. "What a success you have had, Monsieur de Marsan."

"If only it sells," laughed Effie; "but Léon is never good at bargains."

"Never," he answered, pleasantly.

"I was told that some Englishman had bought 'La Cigale' for forty thousand francs," Honour observed.

"A man did commit that folly," replied he, in a jesting tone.

"Why then we will drink his health in champagne," said Effie; adding, in her plaintive tone, "to think Léon had not mentioned it!"

"I forgot that there was one thing about my pictures which is interesting," he answered.

He laughed as he spoke, and Effie laughed too, but Mayne knew that until now the husband and wife had not exchanged a syllable since the day Effie had visited Mrs. Pemberton. However, he was certain they would not quarrel before their guests, and nobody but himself would understand the polite thrusts they were sure to give each other; so he could eat his meal in peace, too much accustomed to their sparring to be troubled, and too little inclined to reflection to think what a melancholy state of affairs their mutual attitude portended, though he liked them both in his careless fashion.

Altogether the *déjeûner* proved very gay and pleasant, and they did drink the health of

the British picture-buyer in champagne, as Effie had promised they should do.

During these later years success and fortune had come to Léon de Marsan, but he had travelled a weary road before reaching either; had toiled on unappreciated, and scarcely noticed, except by the few capable of discovering genius which has not as yet received the stamp of the world's favourable opinion.

Almost any woman will aid and uphold her husband in a great trouble, but there is hardly one that lives who can pardon want of success. In a similar case a woman might be sympathetic for her brother, an eager champion for her son, but forgive her husband—never! "A man's foes are those of his own household." If ever a human being learned the full bitterness hidden in those dismal Scripture words, it was Léon de Marsan.

Success had come at last; wealth had come; but, keenly as she appreciated both, Effie never exactly put her husband on the level she would have done another man who had achieved half as much. She never forgot how long it had been before the world acknowledged his claims. Léon was so finely organized, so morbidly susceptible, that trifles which would have escaped most men stung

him like poisoned daggers, and Effie possessed a positive genius for tormenting and insulting, and yet remaining—conventionally—a lady.

She was especially fond of the society of men whose talent, or rather its fruits, had raised them above the ordinary herd. She would listen when they talked, and if Léon chanced to differ from their opinions, either ignore him altogether, or show that she was annoyed thereby, as she might have done in the case of a very young man. She had cultivated this habit so assiduously during the first years of their marriage, that perhaps she could not now have thrown it aside had she wished. She had so long regarded Léon's work with a sort of commiserating contempt, that possibly she often forgot success had really befallen him.

After breakfast they went into the studio to look at the picture De Marcan was finishing. Effie was in one of her pleasant moods, but she had not forgiven her husband for having discovered why she wished to keep him at home the day De Chantal returned from Paris.

"I like the picture," she said, in answer to some remark of Honour's, "but I do not think it one of Léon's happiest efforts. I am sorry, for it is a commission from an American, and

very few of his paintings have as yet gone across the water."

Of all cruel things, to tell a man when he has nearly completed any mental labour, and is tired in body and mind, that it is not equal to something he has already done, is, I think, the cruelest. Tell him so later, when the work has gone out of his hands, if you feel it your duty, as no doubt you will if you happen to be his intimate friend or near relation, but for God's sake let him alone while he is still working, especially when, whether good or bad, the task has been done to the best of his ability, is too near completion to be altered, and he in the doubtful, discouraged state which is tolerably sure to overtake an artist at that particular season.

De Marsan did not appear to have heard, but the shaft went home. He stood a little in the background, pretending to hunt in a portfolio for some sketches he wished to show Mrs. Pemberton, in reality staring drearily at his picture. It was a gorgeous bit of colouring, and as he looked at it and recalled the miseries of those weeks during which he had worked on it, he felt almost as if he must have put in the red with his very heart's blood.

"I want you to sit for your portrait," Effie

was saying to Honour; "Léon is dying to paint it, aren't you, Léon?"

"If Mrs. Pemberton will trust to the doubtful mercies of my pencil," he answered, laughing; but all the same something in his tone warned Honour's sensitive ear that he had noticed and been disturbed by his wife's criticism. She understood, too, that it was receiving the censure at this particular time which made it hurt, and wondered how Effie, whose tact was usually perfect, could have blundered so sadly.

"Of course I should feel greatly honoured if Monsieur de Marsan would undertake me," she said, "but I always think it looks so pretentious for one deliberately to sit for one's portrait."

"Then let me make use of you as a model," said he. "I have been haunted for some time by an idea for a new picture. Let me put you in as one of the characters."

"Put us all in," cried Effie; "only be sure to give us becoming costumes."

"There will only be three figures—two women and a man—so Mayne and De Chantal will have to draw lots," said De Marsan.

"The fate will fall on De Chantal," observed Mayne; "for I can't be here enough this summer to let you victimize me."

"But Monsieur de Chantal will sit, or pose, or whatever it is you want," said Effie; "he must—I insist upon it."

"Madame's wishes are always commands to me, as she knows," the young man answered, gallantly enough.

"And you will serve my turn better than Gerard," said De Marsan; "I want a very young face, and a very handsome one—"

"That I should be told mine does not come within either category!" interrupted Mayne, laughing.

"And the man is dead," continued De Marsan, musingly; "so I must have a face that can look so: not one person in a hundred can—there is always a bothering expression of some sort to stand in one's way."

The maliciousness of the remark completely escaped De Chantal himself, though the others appreciated it—Effie with an irritation rendered more keen by perceiving that both Honour and her cousin were amused. So far as the features and colouring went, young De Chantal's face was almost perfect; but beyond an habitual sadness, caused by the drooping lids of his great blue eyes and the downward curve of his slight moustache, the countenance was rather devoid of animation.

"You must take a good rest before you begin, Léon; you were tired from your exhibition picture when you set to work on this," said Effie, waving her hand toward the easel.

"Such as it is it must stand," he answered, quickly.

"Ah! yes," sighed Effie; "a thing once done in this world can't be undone."

It struck Honour, for the first time, that the De Marsan household might possibly hold its hidden skeleton. When she knew them in Italy both always appeared so gay and full of spirits that she had regarded their occasional sharp speeches to each other as mere *badinage*, and she liked them so much that she was sorry to think that in their case, as in so many others she had encountered, the matrimonial bond might be a galling yoke instead of a chain of flowers.

Mayne pleaded letters to write, and went away; but he apparently forgot his intention as soon as he had closed the studio door, for he walked out of the house and down the avenue, glancing at his watch as he hurried on like a person who feared being late for some engagement.

Honour and De Marsan were looking over

his sketches; Effie took De Chantal to the further window to show him some flowers, and once there the two remained conversing in a low tone.

De Marsan could always see his wife, no matter how engrossed he might be. He knew that her trick of lowering her voice, lifting her eyes suddenly, looking interested, and all the rest of it, when talking to any man, meant nothing. She never could resist giving the semblance of a flirtation to a *tête-à-tête*, though she might in reality be speaking of nothing more important than the day of the month or the probability of a shower. Léon was accustomed also to seeing her flirt—her devil of coquetry was so strong that nothing could subdue it; but the present affair with Arthur de Chantal was unlike anything which had gone before.

On other occasions, while he could only accuse her of flirtation such as the world tolerates and deems respectable,—while he tried to credit her own words that her cold-blooded temperament would of itself keep her from going beyond those limits,—he had often, in his paroxysms of anger, tortured himself by all manner of evil forebodings and harsh thoughts. But in this matter he carefully avoided such

reflections—argued for her in his own mind as he might have done with a third person.

While he sat talking with Mrs. Pemberton, he distinctly saw Effie slip a note into De Chantal's hand; it was quickly done, but he saw it. A spasm of such rage and pain shook his very soul that he grew dizzy and blind. Honour fancied him tired, and secretly reproached herself for having kept him talking so long without remembering that Effie had told her he was far from well this spring.

"If I do not go away I shall never be able to have the pleasure of coming back," said she, rising.

"I think I prefer the present even to the happiness of anticipating your return," Léon answered, uttering this *fade* compliment steadily enough, though his head was still reeling, and he saw everything through a sort of red mist, as though the bright colour in his picture had permeated the whole apartment.

"You are not going?" called Effie. "I haven't told you about my garden-party. The weather is warm enough now, and that kind of mild festivity will serve to make you acquainted with the whole neighbourhood without any trouble."

"You shall tell me about it when you come to see me—say to-morrow," said Honour.

"No; Léon will be the one to come to-morrow. You have not settled about the sittings; and we are both so delightfully intoxicating that it is safer to take us in separate doses."

"I must charcoal my sketch, so as to give you an idea of what I mean to do," observed De Marsan, in his weary voice.

As Honour persisted in her departure, the bell was rung for the ponies to be ordered. They all went out on the verandah, and stood talking merry nonsense till the equipage appeared. Monsieur de Chantal took his leave immediately after Mrs. Pemberton, and the husband and wife were alone.

Effie began walking up and down the terrace, humming an air from an *opéra bouffe*. Very few people can make a successful attempt of seeming oblivious of another's presence, but Effie had brought the irritating habit to absolute perfection.

"When you have finished Mademoiselle Schneider's song, I should like to speak to you," said Léon.

She continued her promenade, still singing. He waited for a little, and then added,—

"Did you hear me say I wished to speak to you?"

"You said when I had finished Schneider's song—I have not done that yet," returned she.

"Then perhaps you will put it off."

"Most decidedly I will not; the song is amusing, and you the reverse. You are evidently in one of your tempers—you sat glowering till Mrs. Pemberton was driven away in disgust."

"That is not true."

"You are a low, miserable fellow! If I were a man you would not dare tell me I lied."

"I have an idea that I did not as it is."

He walked into the house, and she followed.

"I see you want to quarrel, so we will do it, and have the business over," said she. "Say what you wish to, and be done."

He passed quickly on, and entered his studio. It was very unusual for Effie to be the one who insisted on a battle of words; she would provoke her husband to it by covert insults before other people; by talking *at* him—that most unendurable aggravation to a hasty temper—but it did not often happen to her to begin the duel openly, partly because she hated scenes, and partly because she liked the satisfaction of making De Marsan feel that it was he who

showed himself incapable of self-restraint and a due regard for the outward decencies of life. But this morning she was exasperated; Léon had hit her very hard several times; she was irritated because he had discovered that she went to the station to meet De Chantal, and vexed not only with him, but with Honour and her cousin, because they had unconsciously shown that they considered the young gentleman of less importance than she chose to regard his due. Then, too, De Chantal went away; he had promised his mother to make some visits with her, and Effie wished him to break the engagement for the pleasure of annoying the stiff-backed elderly lady, whom she hated. Altogether, the morning had been a failure, and she was cross—teazed and annoyed beyond the verge which patience ought to endure, would have been her way of putting the matter.

"I do not choose you to insult me, and then turn on your heel and go," she said, walking after her husband into the studio.

"I shall be obliged if you will have the kindness to leave me," returned De Marsan; "I have been interrupted quite long enough in my work."

"When you have outraged me beyond

bearing, you always take refuge in that excuse —else plead that you are ill and suffering. If I were you I would behave less like an old woman."

"God forbid I should act like one of any age, if you are an example of the sex," said he, sitting down before his easel. "Go away, and let me do my work."

"You will never be allowed to accomplish anything worth doing while you behave in so unmanly and contemptible a fashion," she replied.

"I should know just by your mood that you have been at something you are ashamed of," said he.

"You are the shame of my life," she retorted. "Wherever we have happened to live you have made us ridiculous by your horrible temper and your insane jealousy, and you are beginning the same thing here."

"It seems that habits are difficult chains to break, since you too are going on in your old way," he answered.

"Now I suppose poor Arthur de Chantal is to be your *bête noire*—a mere boy! If I were you I would choose some other object."

"It is precisely because he is a boy that your conduct appears so disgusting," returned

he. "You are just reaching the age when women are given to a weakness for boys."

"Perhaps because their decency and honesty make them so great a contrast to a coarse, unclean-minded man like you!"

"Arthur is a nice enough youth, but you know as well as I do that he fancies every woman who looks his way is in love with him, and talks about it. While you call yourself my wife, I object to your exposing yourself and me to that particular sort of scandal."

"Heaven knows I wish from the bottom of my soul I were called by any other name!"

"I should be the last person to try to prevent your changing it; but while you are my wife in name, I swear you shall not give a little idiot like that an opportunity to talk of you as he does of other women."

"You will find it impossible to break any friendship I may form," said she. "Your wishes have ceased to have the slightest influence over me. I shall do nothing wrong; your absurd jealousy will not even harm me in the eyes of others."

"Your ideas of what is wrong appear to me tolerably vague! I suppose slipping a note into De Chantal's hand this morning is included

among the little diversions which a respectable married woman may permit herself?"

"Watching—spying as usual! Short of listening at doors and employing a detective, I think there is no meanness to which you have not descended. The bare fact of your seeing me is proof enough that I was doing nothing wrong."

"You did not suppose I saw you! Mrs. Pemberton might have seen you too. Do you think the performance would not have looked somewhat odd to her eyes?"

"A copy of some verses he had given me to read—all this scene about a matter like that!"

"Even if it had been a bit of blank paper, the intention of secrecy made it improper. You say you do no wrong—I say that when you afford by your manner with men an opportunity for people to speak lightly of you, there is wrongdoing. The woman who lets herself be talked about in that way, is no better than the woman who commits what you would call a downright sin. Your creed is, that as long as you have not positively a lover you are innocent."

"And it will always remain my creed."

"And a more false and damnable one it

would be impossible to hold. There may be some excuse for a woman who runs away from a husband she hates with a man whom she loves—there is none for the wife who lives under her husband's roof and commits every possible sin except the one which human law punishes."

"Of course you will take refuge in vile language, because you know that is the one way in which you can hurt me."

"I have not used such—"

"The sole thing to which I cannot become accustomed," she continued. "You make me feel as if I were living in some unclean place; you make my life unutterably loathsome!"

"When Arthur de Chantal was kissing your hands over and over in the shrubberies the other day, you did not feel unclean, I suppose!"

"Poor boy—he really did not know what he was doing! He found me crying—I don't often do that, I admit—he was so full of sympathy that he could only think of my suffering. It was silly, and I told him so. I suppose now, just because he behaved as any chivalrous, right-minded man would, I am to be called every name your catalogue of coarse epithets can hold."

"The boy himself I do not blame in the least! The married woman of your age who is made love to has taken the initiatory steps herself."

"If I were to become vile and wicked, you would only have yourself to blame."

"You might as well say that the housemaid must become a thief because I accuse her of having stolen my watch. See here, Effie! Stop now—stop where you are. Let us both try to begin a different life! Give up your flirtations—"

"You use that name if I speak to a man."

"I do not, and you know it. I am glad to see you admired; I am pleased when I go into a room to see men crowd about you, to hear you talk, to see how superior you are to ordinary women."

"The Grand Lama actually paying compliments!" sneered she.

"The only thing to which I object," he continued, resolutely restraining his anger, "is to see you pick out one man and get yourself talked about on his account. Have twenty men in the house every day if you like, walk out with a different one each morning, but give up the habit of having some one man for your especial cavalier."

"I shall change nothing," she answered.

"Because it is not general attention and admiration you care about—because you want some man either idiotically in love with you, else bringing the evidences of a wicked passion into your presence each time he comes there."

"No man except you has ever ventured to insult me, Monsieur."

"Because you do not consider it an insult to read wicked thoughts in his eyes. Because you keep him from downright base proposals you call it only a pleasant, permissible diversion."

"Having a cleaner mind than yours, I do not see such atrocities. If a pure woman is obliged to perceive that she has mistaken the man she has called friend, she always knows how to put him in place."

"At least, then, you admit that the woman might have put herself in a position — she being married—to hear the man avow his love for her?"

Effie only shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Yet you hold that she is not degraded, simply because she does not become his mistress! Now I say that when a married woman has by deliberate flirtation turned the head of a young man till he forgets himself, or has led

on an older one till he believes that he is at liberty to avow his love, she is degraded."

"It is possible that your opinions are valuable to yourself, Monsieur de Marsan," she replied, coldly; "I can only say that they do not interest me."

"You refuse to do what I ask?"

"I refuse to change my conduct in any particular,—is that clear enough? You have told me that you did not love me—"

"And I lied when I said so, and you knew it!" he interrupted.

"It was, and is true! Let me alone! Lead your own life—I do not interfere with you—no matter what you might do, I should not; all I ask is peace," she continued.

"You choose a strange way for arriving at that blessing," he said.

"It *is* my way, at all events, and you will have to submit to it."

I think Effie did not know it—we so seldom understand the motives which actuate us, however clear-sighted we may be in regard to those of other people—but she was disappointed because Léon had not given way to one of his violent fits of temper. She was disappointed, yet so full of contradictions is human nature that there was nothing she dreaded so much as

an outbreak, though she not unfrequently deliberately brought such on. Now she passed suddenly into one of her still, cold rages, almost as insane as those to which he was given; but concerning which she could never, even when looking back upon them, bring herself to believe that she had been angry, or had uttered a word which was unjustifiable.

"You hate me," she said, "and I loathe and despise you! I suppose we must drag on the burden of our lives together; but at least I will not be your slave! I bear half the load; I may have to obey the driver; but it shall be fate I recognize, not you! You are not my master—you are only my fellow-slave. I will change nothing,—do you hear? I reject your advice—I scorn your aspersions—I wish to God I were a worse woman, to make you fitly repent them!"

So then his passion flamed up to meet hers, and they quarrelled as only two creatures fastened by an indissoluble bond ever can do.

"Go out of my room!" he said at last.

He moved toward her; she deliberately fell on the floor. She pretended to have slipped in shrinking from his approach.

"Either you will get up and go out, or I will carry you into the next room," he said.

She would not stir. He did pick her up, did carry her into the adjoining apartment, and locked the door behind her.

At dinner Effie appeared with her arm in a sling.

"What is the matter?" Mayne asked.

"My husband hurt me," she replied.

"Accidentally, of course?"

"No doubt," said she, in her bitterest tone.

De Marsan did not speak a word. Mayne dropped the subject. He knew that the injury had been an accident, else that Effie had done it herself; but just then he was too much worried with troubles of his own to care particularly about theirs.

CHAPTER IX.

LÉON'S PICTURE.

HONOUR PEMBERTON was sitting before the desk in her business-room at the sugar factory, open books and letters by her, and Monsieur de Vieuxville standing near, busily explaining certain matters to her comprehension.

She looked handsome enough this morning to have made it excusable on the part of the most prosaic business man that ever lived had his thoughts wandered somewhat from the task in hand; but Monsieur de Vieuxville could not have appeared more calm, or given his explanations more lucidly, had his companion been a snuffy old bachelor in spectacles instead of the dainty feminine picture she was.

"I think I understand the whole affair," Honour said, and then began to laugh. "If I did not, it is clear enough to you, and that would be quite sufficient."

Most men would have expressed gratification at the compliment. Monsieur de Vieuxville only asked,—

"Do you feel inclined to try for the contract?"

"Of course. You are satisfied that it will be a good thing."

"I have made it perfectly clear that there must be a large outlay, and that the money cannot come out of the business?"

"I am quite ready to advance it. I can fill up the cheques now if you wish."

"Not yet, please. We have not yet got the contract," he said, and now he did smile; but, so far from the indiscretion irritating Honour, she laughed again.

If anybody, on the first evening she saw Monsieur de Vieuxville, had told her that within six weeks she would be conversing with him as pleasantly as now, with such honest, growing esteem on her part, she would have scorned the prophet as a lunatic. Nevertheless, the thing had come to pass, and it did not even seem strange to Honour, so rapidly had she forgotten her prejudice against Monsieur—I should have said so completely had she ignored it, for that is what we all do when circumstances convince us that we have been unjust or hasty in our judgments.

The time had passed very pleasantly to Honour. The weather had grown each day

more beautiful, as if to convince her that its natural mood was one of placidity and sunshine, and that the gloom and tempest which had at first oppressed her were only stray visitants from some foreign shore, for whose evil behaviour the Norman climate was in no way responsible.

The advent into the neighbourhood of a rich and handsome widow had naturally produced a certain degree of interest and excitement. Everybody had known "all about her" before her arrival, and there was not a soul, even to the three or four stately Legitimist families whom narrow means forced to live upon their impoverished country estates the year round, but displayed a gratifying alacrity in making her acquaintance. Whenever she spent a season in Paris, not only did modern society delight to welcome her, but the most exclusive and dreary *salons* of the Faubourg St. Germain opened wide their doors at her approach. It was no secret that the Duke of Motto Notto had been anxious to offer her a share of his titles and grandeur. He and his ancient petrifaction of a mother admitted the fact without hesitation. The Pope had promised a dispensation, and, what was oddest of all, they remained her fast friends though she had been

insane enough to decline entering the august family.

What better proof of her worthiness, not only of attention but worship, could be desired? Not to seem irreverent, St. Peter's favourable verdict on a spirit newly arrived at the gates of Paradise could scarcely produce a deeper effect upon the seraphim within than the approval of any creature by the Motto Nottos must on the minds of all human beings properly born and bred.

Effie de Marsan's garden-party had proved a great success, and several personages had gone who might have forgotten to appear had they not known it was given in honour of Mrs. Pemberton. Effie had taken her arm out of its sling, and was radiant that day, fairly dividing with her chief guest the admiration of the magnates, though during the previous fortnight there had been growing against her a certain *sourd* prejudice, originating with Madame de Chantal, of which Effie was as yet entirely unaware.

Since then the neighbourhood had been gay with a procession of *fêtes*, among which a couple of dinners given by Honour were not the least successful.

Exaggeration is by no means confined to evil

reports. Give a woman a reputation for being a wit, and every word she utters will be considered a *bon mot*. This is still truer in regard to wealth. The cyphers of Honour's fortune had increased in passing from lip to lip until she was credited with fabulous wealth.

Naturally, under those circumstances, she might indulge in any caprice she saw fit, from being the mistress of the great sugar factory to keeping a school. Indeed, in these days, when English earls sell their butter, and the sons of great French noblemen are silent partners in shops, it is difficult to decide just at what point fine people's scorn for business ends. For instance, the ruined Marquis de Vieuxville lost no caste by filling the position of director of Mrs. Pemberton's business, which included the extensive cultivation of Silesian beets and the manufacture of sugar, though I am sure the names sound dreadful enough.

"In proposing this to you," Monsieur de Vieuxville was saying, "I am simply carrying out what I know would have been your relative's plan had he lived. I am equally certain that it will make a great deal of money."

"The new buildings you tell me are almost completed."

"Yes. The refinery and the centrifugal

machinery will be ready by the time we need this addition to carry out our contracts with foreign countries. I have entered into negotiations for procuring the superior class of workmen we shall require."

"I know."

"Now, all these outlays will draw very heavily upon your private fortune—yet, unless employed, the business can never be made the important matter Mr. Sanford intended it to be. It was that consideration which caused me to write you as I did at the time of his death, so that you might in time dispose of the sugar business, if you wished."

"I am as firm as ever in my determination to go on," replied Honour, with a smile. "Perhaps I had an undeveloped love of money. I think I must be anxious to grow as rich as people choose to think me."

"Oh, they have decided you are a sort of female Rothschild!"

"Well, you and I know the truth. I am sufficiently rich to satisfy any reasonable woman—if you can imagine such an anomaly! Still, my coffers are not bottomless, so we will go on with the sugar, and outdo Rothschild."

"You jest, Madame," he said gravely, "but I have learned to know you well enough to

understand your real motives, and I honour you for them. You are doing more good by following out your plan than you could in any other way. You employ hundreds of poor men—to take a wider range—you are actually helping the whole country, for just at this time France needs the benefit of large mercantile operations perhaps more than at any previous stage of her history."

"I really think you are paying me a compliment," laughed Honour; "I did not believe you would ever do such a thing! But I don't mean to have those grand motives imputed to me; I should get afraid of myself as philanthropic, or strong-minded, or something else dreadful."

"It would not be quite easy to fancy you either of the latter."

"Business, business!" interrupted she, playfully, holding up a warning finger. "We are not marquis and fine lady here—we are just two commonplace creatures eager for gold."

He answered her jestingly, but immediately after went on with the details of which they had been conversing.

"That there is a large fortune to be made I am certain, as I told you at first, but you will

not think me intrusive if I repeat the caution I ventured in the beginning to suggest."

"I expect perfect candour from you," she replied gravely; "holding the relations that we do, it is imperative."

"And I mean to be faithful to my trust. I feel that I have taken a great responsibility on myself in pointing out to you these plans for the enlargement of the business, which will in time make it one of the most considerable of the sort in France."

"They were my relative's plans," Honour answered. "When I accepted the trust he left me I accepted his projects. Even if they were to fail you could never blame yourself."

"At the same time you must remember that in order to take up the mortgages you have advanced a large sum—twenty thousand pounds drawn directly out of one's capital *is* a large sum. Now, in addition to that, if you get those Bristol and Glasgow contracts, there will have to be an advance of at least ten thousand pounds more."

"I have made all my calculations," Honour said, "and I mean to go on. I want to say one other thing—I could not have ventured to do so had the circumstances been different. Much as I might have wished to develope my

relative's plans, I could not have ventured to enlarge the business had I not found in you a coadjutor so capable, and who entered so heartily into my interests."

"I thank you," he said simply.

Then for a few minutes they busied themselves over statements and figures, and were business-like enough. Presently the clock struck twelve. Honour exclaimed,

"I did not think it had been so late! I shall have to go. I can't let Monsieur de Marsan waste his day."

"How is the picture getting on?"

"Admirably. I think it will be one of his best. Now, then, have we done all that is absolutely necessary for this morning?"

"Yes. I shall write to the refiners at Bristol and Glasgow; after that, matters can be arranged by telegraph. We have settled the terms on which we can deliver the raw sugar. If they agree, we shall be ready to plant a greater breadth of beet, and contract extensively with the farmers, so as to have a sufficient supply for these large deliveries."

She nodded her head to show that she understood.

"By the way," he continued, "I had not fully explained to you about those much

vaunted improvements in the crystalization and vacuum pans—they are very successful indeed."

"Then we must have them by all means."

"Only they will cost more money."

"Then we must spend more. Let us lose no chance whatever. I understand the whole matter, I think. I want you to go on as independently as if I had no voice. I am satisfied with the plan, and wish it carried out in every particular as if you were acting entirely for yourself."

He bowed.

"Now that you are fully decided," he said, "I can tell you how pleased I am—personally. I am greatly interested in the business. Perhaps mine is not a very lofty ambition, but it is what it is."

As she drove away toward the De Marsans' house, Honour found herself thinking of De Vieuxville's words, and marvelling, as she had before done, that he was quite content with his life. That he possessed unusual talents she knew: he was energetic and industrious; it seemed strange he should be satisfied with the future which lay before him. She wondered that he did not interest himself in politics; to her the fact that he came from a family of

Legitimists was no reason why he should not serve his country, because the form of government was not in keeping with his ideas and creeds. But these were matters of which he never talked to her; indeed, though they had grown such good friends, he seldom spoke about himself, and there were still times when his peculiarities irritated Honour. She had ceased to think him arrogant and overbearing, but now she had decided he was to rank among her friends she was a little surprised and annoyed —unconsciously—that he did not show her the full confidence to which her intimate associates had accustomed her.

"So far shalt thou go and no further," seemed to be Armand de Vieuxville's maxim in his intercourse with his fellows, and, though this might be a very admirable rule as regarded humanity in general, Honour was vaguely disappointed that an exception had not been made in her favour.

He visited her frequently, not on any pretence of business—such matters were always reserved for her periodical visits at the counting-house,—he came because it was evident he found pleasure in her society, and Honour fully returned the feeling. He had travelled much —he was highly cultivated—one of the finest

amateur musicians she had ever met—thoroughly conversant with the literature of the past and present—and he talked wonderfully well. They often disagreed, and sometimes there was a certain harshness in his judgments of men and things which nettled Honour into ferocious arguments, but all the same he was gaining an influence over her mind, of which she was as yet entirely unaware. One of Honour's theories—I may say her pet theory—was the possibility of friendship between a man and woman of just such character as might exist between two persons of the same sex. Honour would have scorned the word platonic, as a direct contradiction of the sentiment which she believed possible, reasonable, and natural. It was an established truth in her mind that she was never to be in love—since she had adopted Monsieur de Vieuxville into her esteem she had taken up that belief for him, too, because he was so different from most other men she had known, whose only idea of acquaintance with a woman seemed to consist in absurd flattery and love-making, either real or pretended.

Like all impulsively-generous persons, Honour was apt, on finding that she had misjudged any one, to go to the opposite extreme. She had

wronged Monsieur de Vieuxville in her idea of his character, and could not make sufficient amends. She was ashamed to remember that she had at first been inclined to think he was capable of proving a dangerous acquaintance for an unprotected girl like Gracieuse Galais, and told herself that she must be as gossip-loving and evil-minded as the most ordinary, frivolous woman, to have rushed to such conclusions upon so slight basis.

The recollection was unpleasant, so she put it aside, and allowed herself to drift into familiar intercourse with Monsieur in a way that would have astonished her had she reflected thereupon. She thought about him a great deal—much more than she knew—and had arranged a romance in his past. Prosaic as she tried to be, Honour was too thoroughly human not to love a romance. She decided that when quite young he had loved; either adverse fortunes or some equally potent cause had rendered it necessary to accept existence separated from that chance of happiness, and he had done so bravely, though not without suffering. For he had suffered—she was sure of that. He was like a man who had made some great sacrifice and gone on unrepiningly, though while this life might last, his soul

would never wear out the impress of that suffering.

Honour built up this creed and dwelt upon it, and glorified him for his manly fortitude, so engrossed thereby that she entirely forgot to notice that, in spite of her efforts to keep down to the commonplace and prosaic, she was rather given to dreams and romantic fancies.

So she thought about him this morning as she drove on toward the Hermitage, and because she managed to mix the Sugar Works and the manager occasionally in her mind, was quite satisfied that she had been severely practical and sedate.

She was more intimate with the De Marsans than any other of the families who came within her orbit. One could not easily help being charmed with Madame, and as she had set her heart on fascinating Honour—she liked women's society, this odd compound of an Effie—she showed the very nicest side of her character. De Marsan, too, visited her frequently, and she liked him, wondering often why he was not a happy man, for that he was not she felt certain. She had rather accepted Effie's idea, that it was only the usual morbid character of a man of genius—such people were always unhealthy

minded, though certainly great genius ought not to be.

There is nothing so despicable as a woman who talks against her own husband, and yet I grieve to say the fault is a common one. Effie de Marsan was strong in her contempt of such women, still she was always appealing for sympathy against Léon, only she had the art of doing it in a way which made even stern censors blind to the fact that she was complaining. They only thought that De Marsan's violent temper or morbid, uncertain moods had forced themselves upon their observation, and that Effie spoke because she saw they noticed these faults and was anxious to excuse him.

It is fairly a proverb that you have only to believe strongly enough in yourself to make others believe in you. Effie as firmly believed that she was actuated by such motives in regard to her husband as she did in the truth of her religion and her faith that she was a religious woman—in which latter credence especially her faith was unbounded. Hence, perhaps, her success in accomplishing the difficult feat of complaining of her husband without exposing herself to the condemnation less adroit females bring upon their heads by such unwifely conduct.

"You are twenty minutes late!" cried Effie, coming out of the house as Honour drove up. "I know it is all the fault of those stupid Works!"

"Yes; Monsieur de Vieuxville and I—"

"My dear, of course I meant Monsieur, though I thought it delicate to disguise him under another name."

"You are a goose!" pronounced Honour, as she stepped from the carriage and kissed her friend good morning.

"You would not have me disgrace my sex by coming out in any other character, I hope," laughed Effie. "How well you are looking—Works certainly have a becoming effect upon you! I really think I shall adopt Works myself—of some sort. I wouldn't meddle with yours, of course, for the world."

"Don't be wasting time in nonsense. Lead the way to the studio at once, and let us do our duty."

"Bless me, how uncompromising Works—oh, don't pinch me—well, business discussions, have made you!"

"The virtuous consciousness of—"

"I'll run away if you finish!" cried Effie, putting her fingers in her ears.

"How is Monsieur de Marsan this morning?"

Honour asked, as they walked on toward the *atelier*.

Effie's face assumed its grieved expression —she was very pretty so.

"Poor fellow, he did not sleep—he is not well," she said. "Don't you mind if he is abrupt and odd. I was sorry we were to sit to-day."

"He ought not to have us if he is suffering."

"I know; it is of no use to say anything —it would only irritate him: I pass my life trying to avoid that, the dear old boy!" She stopped in the hall as she spoke, and held Honour's hand for an instant. "Go in," she added, in her *voilée* voice, which sounded full of tears. "I will come in a moment—I am stupid and upset! I get so anxious about him! Don't speak, that's a dear! I'll follow you directly."

Honour passed on. Effie called in a whisper,—

"You won't mind, remember, even if—if things don't go quite smoothly; it is only that he is not well."

Honour looked back to give her one sympathizing glance, and crossed the rooms which lay between the hall and the studio. Effie stood still for a moment or two, leaning her

hand on a table and sighing again. She looked very interesting in this attitude—a mirror which hung opposite showed her she did, though she was not in the least aware that she was thinking so. Then she walked along the corridor and entered a room at the end.

Arthur de Chantal was pacing up and down the pretty apartment, his handsome youthful face rather disturbed and troubled.

"Madame Pemberton is here; I must go to the studio," she said. "I want to hear what it was your mother really said. I shall see you this evening at the Hautevilles."

"Why can't I go into the *atelier?*" he asked.

She shook her head with that pensive smile so becoming to her. "It is a cloudy day everywhere," she said. "No, you must not come. You are not needed to sit—Monsieur is busy with Madame Pemberton. Please go—don't ask any questions—only go."

"It will be such a long day, and I have nothing to do," he sighed.

"Poor fellow!" laughed she. "Go home, and let mamma lecture you, it will do you great good, I am sure."

"How you delight in teazing me!" he exclaimed, with a boyish impatience, rather graceful than otherwise.

"You are my friend," she answered, in her softest tone, "almost my only one—remember that! Good-bye—you don't want to get me a scolding?" She held out her hand. He took it, snatched the other also, looking in her face with his beautiful eyes full of tender pleading. She shook her head gravely, though a certain coquettish manner prevented the rebuke being very severe.

"You must not do that," she said. "I have told you so before; don't let me have to repeat it."

He pressed her hands to his lips—kissed them several times eagerly, passionately, and hurried away. Effie walked toward the studio, perfectly satisfied, no doubt, that there had been nothing in the interview to which any reasonable husband could object. To kiss a lady's hand is the commonest habit in the world with Frenchmen or Italians in greeting or leaving a female acquaintance. Fortified by this recollection, Effie did not deem it necessary to remember that a thing may be done in two ways so unlike that even the action itself is not the same.

When Honour tapped at the door of the studio, De Marsan rose and opened it. He certainly did not look well, but he greeted her with his usual manner.

"I am afraid I am somewhat behind time," she said.

"Never mind; we will make up for it now you are here," he answered. "There will be no bother about costume, for I mean to work on your face this morning—I have not caught the expression."

She went up to the easel and examined the picture. "You have done a good deal since I saw it," she observed.

"Yes; I was in a mood for work yesterday."

It was a large canvas; the figures were almost life-size. The subject told its own story. In the background a sweep of stormy sea, with the breakers foaming over a ledge of rocks; above, an early morning sky, which looked sullen and lowering in spite of its gorgeous yellow clouds, while a line of black mist lying low down against the horizon gave warning of a tempest. To the right, in the middle distance, the towers of an old castle were visible. The foreground was a stretch of yellow sand.

There were three figures. A man (De Chantal's face was already a likeness) lay dead—a knife in his heart—a stream of blood slowly oozing out beneath the topaz hilt of the dagger. Beside the body crouched a woman—this was

Honour's position. Another woman had turned to flee. She was looking back at the kneeling figure, a wicked smile of triumph on her lips, pointing with one hand toward the dead man. The costumes were those of a bygone age—festive garments, which made you understand that the three had passed the night in a revel at the castle—that the two women had found the man lying there dead. You understood, too, that she with the evil smile and gorgeous yellow robe, her arms and shoulders bare, had caused this death and brought her rival to see him there. The face was fearfully like Effie's, yet the expression was such as Honour thought Effie's face never could have worn. The colouring of the picture was marvellous—De Marsan was a master in that. He had dared to put at least four different tints of yellow in the picture—the yellow of the sky, the reflection of that on the sands, another yellow into Effie's robe, and still another into her hair. It was a bold thing to do, but he would be successful—the painting had gone far enough for this to be certain.

"What do you think of it?" Honour heard him ask.

She shivered—the painting affected her like a nightmare.

"It is wonderful," she said. "I think you have never equalled either the figure drawing or the colouring; but it is so painful."

He laughed.

"I feel whenever I am at work on it as if it were to be my last picture," he said. "I feel often as if it were my own corpse I was looking at, for all it has De Chantal's face. I know how silly it is, but you see I have got in the habit of telling you the truth."

"I think it is because you are not well," Honour said gently. "If you would give up work till autumn I am sure it would be wise."

"There is no sign of failing power in that," he answered, rather proudly, the light coming back to his weary eyes.

"Indeed there is not. I believe it will be your greatest success."

"So much the better, in case it should prove my last," he said. Then he added, hastily,—"I am well enough; who says I am not? I am not just a Hercules, but you know it is the cracked pitcher goes longest to the well. Once this is done, I will rest—I will indeed."

He sat down before the easel, and took up his palette. Honour would have liked to say more—somehow she could not then. Whatever ailed the man? Whether physical or mental

pain, he was in a mood when even kindness or sympathy would prove torture.

"Where am I to place myself?" she asked.

"In this chair; there is no need troubling you to take that attitude. I am only going to work on the face."

Presently Effie came in, a little subdued, but wondrously sweet and amiable, and full of admiration for what Léon was doing—only she did not mention a single detail in the picture, except to suggest the possibility of a change—it would be perfect if it were only just not what it was!

He worked rather silently. Effie and Honour talked.

"Monsieur de Chantal does not come," Honour said.

"No; there was no need of him."

"Well, he could not know that," observed Léon. "I did not tell him so the other day."

"He sent this morning to ask," replied Effie, "and I said you meant to devote yourself to Madame's portrait."

The sitting lasted over an hour, then *déjeûner* was announced. Léon stayed to put his brushes in water; the two ladies went out. Before entering the breakfast-room, De Marsan passed into the apartment at the end of the hall for

a book of which he had been speaking to Honour. He saw a kandkerchief lying on the floor, and picked it up. It bore a coronet, and De Chantal's name underneath.

"Sent!" he said, under his breath. "I knew she had seen him."

He flung the handkerchief away, found the volume he wanted, and joined his wife and their guest.

He rushed suddenly into his gayest mood, but bright and witty as he was, it troubled Honour from its feverishness, though Effie seemed quite unconscious.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPIDER'S WEB.

Mr. Gerard Mayne had as pretty a faculty for getting into scrapes as one could desire to see in the son of one's best friend. You think I meant to say enemy; nothing of the sort. There is no special pleasure in watching the offspring of a foe go astray—it was to be expected that *his* child would; but human nature is so constituted that there is a mournful satisfaction felt when the friend of one's bosom has an heir who rushes to the dogs, because one has to pity said friend, and what human nature pities it looks down upon, and human nature likes to regard things from a height, especially friends.

Mr. Mayne's vagaries had led him into close intimacy with a certain Monsieur Pellerin—had, in fact, placed him in that gentleman's power. It is not an agreeable thing to be in the power of any created creature, least of all in that of a man who means to use the

hold to serve his own ends at any cost to his victim, and Monsieur Pellerin was a person to do this.

I do not know that I am to stigmatize Monsieur Pellerin as utterly depraved on account of that peculiarity, for I dare say there were nice sides to his character, but an unscrupulous man he certainly was.

He owned a large sugar manufactory and refinery near Rouen, and the establishment which Honour Pemberton had inherited was his sole rival in that part of France.

He was about forty—a rather handsome, agreeable person; talked well, lived well, and was so good an imitation of a gentleman in his ordinary manners, that many people were deluded into believing him the genuine article. He called himself an offshoot of a certain great Breton family—impoverished in these days, but appallingly great still, because they increased their own stature by the enormous shadow of their ancestors—who wrote themselves Pellerin de Lastrelle de Rivière. This statement on the sugar-baker's part was unsupported by any evidence whatsoever, and I think he would scarcely have made it in the presence of a member of the Breton brood.

About the time Honour Pemberton began to

feel settled in her new home, Gerard Mayne had gone over to visit a relative in England; and a little before the period for his return he received a letter from Monsieur Pellerin, which induced him, when once on his journey, to continue it as far as Rouen instead of leaving the Dieppe and Paris Railway at a station near the former place, where a branch line would have conducted him to Sainton.

Monsieur Pellerin's refinery and sugar works were in the outskirts of the town, and Gerard Mayne drove thither direct from the *gare*. He was shown into that gentleman's private office, and received with a friendliness which would have been more gratifying unmarred by a smile of triumph on Monsieur Pellerin's lips, which seemed to say,—"I knew you would come. I should like to have seen you try not doing it."

But Mayne was a heedless fellow, and perhaps did not notice the smile—at least he gave no sign of having done so. Almost his first words held a confession which it is not exactly pleasant to make to a creditor; but Mayne was sensible enough, when he had a disagreeable truth to tell, to get it over as soon as possible.

"I have not brought back a sou," said he, bluntly, speaking in French, because the

sugar-man was not skilled in the grammarless mysteries of the English tongue; speaking, too, with a stronger foreign accent than usual, from the fact that he was flurried and anxious, though he did laugh, as if trying to believe that facing a creditor with this announcement was the best joke in the world. "Not a sou, and not a hope of one."

"Well, you certainly do not leave me the torture of doubt," returned Monsieur Pellerin, and he laughed too, not as though the fact of the money-failure were a good jest, but as if he had some plan for using his debtor which might prove as satisfactory as receiving his shekels.

Whether Mayne had noticed the smile of triumph or not, he did observe the meaning of that laugh, and it was plain that it irritated him. He forced his hand loose from the amical grasp in which the sugar-refiner still held it, and added abruptly,—

"What do you propose to do about it? I know something devilishly disagreeable is coming, else you would never laugh like that."

"Dear boy, you are not complimentary!" Of course he said friend; one always does in French—one never does in English, except in

a letter. The term means nothing in either case, but as I am not stealing (to the best of my knowledge) from a French author, I must put the conversation into every-day English.

"Hang compliments!" quoth Mayne.

"By no means," returned Monsieur Pellerin; "they are the salt of life,"—and he was right. "See here, your misanthropic mood does not surprise me; you have been for four weeks in that birthplace of fogs and spleen—Eeengland" (he believed this word English), "so it is not surprising that you come back morose and ill tempered. But I decline to be infected—"

"That is not sense," interrupted Mayne, laughing out with the recklessness which made part of his nature; "you should have said that you had been vaccinated at your christening (only I cannot imagine your ever having been christened), and so cannot take the disease."

"Not bad," replied Monsieur, "though I should have put it in another way."

"I don't care how you would have put it, and I am in a humour to quarrel," retorted Mayne; but he said it with his airiest, most boyish manner, and evidently meant nothing of the sort.

"You could not make me quarrel with you,"

Pellerin answered, gravely; "I like you, and should refuse to be angry whatever you might say."

"You must have some monstrously good reason for being so polite and forbearing."

"Of course I have! Life is not long enough so that one can afford even to waste compliments."

"Then you had better speak out and have done. I know in advance that you want something I shall refuse to do."

"I do not think you will refuse," Monsieur Pellerin said, softly; "I do not think you will, dear Gerard."

"Never build any hope on me! I only believe in one virtue—inconsistency; one god —*l'inattendu!* Come, what do you want?"

"More information in regard to what is going on at the sugar factory De Vieuxville manages. Come, you see I can be blunt too!"

"*In extremis!* But this time deep-laid frankness is a failure. I am barely on speaking terms with Monsieur de Vieuxville. I know Madame Pemberton very slightly."

Monsieur Pellerin laughed again, and evidently was enjoying his own mirth—not an ordinary thing.

"My dear Mayne," he said, "I am not an ass."

"No; whatever you may be, you are not that."

"Then why do you behave as if you thought me one?"

"If I did, it was simple stupidity on my part, I assure you."

"Now, Gerard, I am going to be disagreeable. You said I meant to be. I am too civil not to try to prove your claims to being a prophet."

Gerard took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, lighted one, leaned back in his chair, and said, tranquilly,—

"Fire away, Master Pellerin."

"I fire?" returned the sugar-maker. "A few months ago you lost seventy thousand francs at a gaming-table in Paris—"

"Seventy-five thousand," interpolated Mayne.

"Ah, yes; you are right! Five thousand you had—thirty thousand you—" He stopped, for Mayne had made an impatient movement. After waiting to smile and nod his head, he went on—"you had too; the remainder I paid. I had already paid a fair sum for you. Little Gerard, you owe me in all a hundred thousand francs."

"And I wish devoutly the devil had you," cried Mayne.

"In that case you would sooner or later find your creditor," replied Monsieur Pellerin, with a polite bow. "Do not be English—that is, ill bred! I think, little Gerard, that you have not treated me well."

"You asked impossibilities," said Mayne. "You expected me to persuade Madame Pemberton to sell the Sugar Works—a stranger to me—a woman at that! I did try to show her the business was in a doubtful state—that ten to one she would throw good money after bad, if she attempted to go on. I hinted that I knew she could sell. The more I talked, of course the more obstinately she clung to her idea, woman-like."

"Do you know what she has done?"

"Yes; paid the money her relation borrowed on a mortgage in order to keep his Moloch moving. I happen to know also, what neither the relative nor De Vieuxuille knew, that it was in reality you who advanced the sum, and I know too that you thought you had trapped your rival thereby. So you would have done, only he dies, and enter Madame Pemberton, with a pocket full of gold and a fine craze for being a sugar-maker from philanthropic prin-

ciples—gold and philanthropy have been too many for you."

"I do not think so," replied Monsieur Pellerin, quietly.

"The devil you do not; and how do you think even *he* could help you?" asked Mayne.

"In the person of his favourite child—yourself, dear boy."

"If your compliment were true, I am at a loss to see how he could put it in my power to assist you, always supposing I wished to," returned Mayne, speaking lightly, though his eyes took an anxious look.

"I could not possibly suppose anything else; I am sure you will do your best to aid a friend," Pellerin said, with slow emphasis.

"I tell you there is nothing I *can* do," exclaimed Mayne, irritably; "more than that—I may as well speak out plainly—"

"Of course, of course, dear boy!"

"I don't mean to play the rascal to please you, Antoine Pellerin. It has happened that I could give you two or three bits of information, and I did so, but it was a mere chance that I found out what I did. As for turning myself into a spy for your benefit—in short, as I said, playing the rascal—I don't mean to do it."

"Ah, Monsieur has scruples of conscience! They must of course simply arise from the fact that you would be playing the rascal, as you call it, for the benefit of another."

Pellerin was smiling still, but face and voice held a threat which Mayne could not mistake.

"I tell you there is nothing I can do," he repeated, angrily.

"And I tell you there is a great deal you can do, and you will do it," replied Pellerin. Then his tone changed from one of menace to a sort of mocking amity, as he added, "You are too good-hearted a man not to want to help a friend in every way possible."

To judge from his face, Gerard Mayne did not appreciate the compliment as he might have done, and he took no pains to hide that such was the case, saying shortly,—

"There is nothing possible. I have told you so at least three times."

As suddenly as if he had done it from impulse, Monsieur Pellerin deliberately flung off the restraint he had put upon himself, all disguise of good-humour and friendliness, and allowed his words to express the threats which face and voice had held before.

"Gerard Mayne," said he, "you will do what I want, or I will crush you like a toad

under a harrow! I speak clearly, do I not? I will crush you—I will ruin you—I will put you down in hell and fasten you there without sending you out of this world!"

"Pellerin!"

"You know me! What I say I will do I do. I never break my word. *You* to hesitate about playing the rascal—*you!* See here, this is not a farce in a theatre, young gentleman! Ha! We are a gentleman—we shall have a fortune one day—we condescend to poor Antoine Pellerin—we make use of him—we borrow his money—we let him stand between us and social ruin, disgrace,—do you hear?—a convict's cell! And when he asks for, not common gratitude, but a return that costs us no trouble even, we fly in his face and call him bad names."

"Pellerin!" The first utterance of the name had held a sort of appeal; there was only hot rage in the tone now.

"Hold your tongue—don't dare to speak! That is not all! I know what happened last autumn when you were gone. Your relative shall know it, with such proofs that she will make a new will the day she receives the information—a will in which the only mention of you will be a curse, you young devil!"

"I swear to God I'll kill you, or you shall me, if you say another word!" cried Mayne, springing out of his seat.

Pellerin drew a pistol from his pocket.

"I am an old traveller," said he, with a wicked laugh. "If you lift a finger, I'll not only shoot you, but I'll send you to jail. I'll not only ruin you, but I will make *her* so infamous—"

He stopped abruptly, for Mayne had dropped back into his chair as white as a ghost.

"Ah, that touches you," continued the other; "I thought it would."

Even his apparent anger had been acting—a child could hardly have failed to discover that. Now, as suddenly as he had blazed into wrath, he resumed his composure and his mocking good nature.

"We are a pair of fools," said he, "and I am the bigger one of the two. I beg your pardon, little Gerard; it was brutal to tell you such truths. All the same, they are truths; but I am quite willing to put them out of sight and to forget that they exist if you will only behave like the sensible fellow I have always given you credit for being."

Mayne leaned his elbows on the table and rested his face upon his hands. He was

struggling violently with himself, and it was plain that no personal consideration would have restrained him; but Pellerin had conquered by his mention of a woman who would be dragged down in any exposure that might overtake the young man.

"I suppose you can ruin me if you like," he said, in a choked voice. "You are right enough to call me a rascal, but, by Heaven, bad as I am, there are things I can't do."

"What, for instance?"

"Just the thing you ask—to find out Mrs. Pemberton's plans and ruin the business by helping you to forestall her in the contracts."

"Bosh!" interrupted Pellerin, with good-natured contempt. "Who wants to ruin her? She is as rich as Crœsus. Losing contracts could not ruin her, but she will tire of advancing money. Sooner or later she must in any case distrust De Vieuxville, who is a greater rascal than either of us. She will sell the Works, and I shall become the purchaser. I shall simply absorb my rival. There is no villainy in that."

He spoke with studied carelessness. He meant this very quiet to make his words tell, and he succeeded; he was astute enough to perceive it.

"Ah ha," he continued, "you had not looked at the matter in this light. You must needs have a theatre-piece, with a victim and a villain and a woman dragged in, and all the rest of it."

"But I tell you that even if I had the best will in the world I could not help you," Mayne said.

"I wouldn't repeat that if I were you. Well, well! Do you want me to write to the respected relative in England? Do you want me to visit the charming cousin?—"

Mayne had reseated himself after his late outburst, but again he rose.

"I am going away," said he. "I'll be hanged if I stop here any longer to listen to your talk."

"Dear boy, I have not the slightest doubt as to your ultimately being hanged; but the present business does not involve that catastrophe. Nothing more serious than a prison could overtake you in case—"

"Well, in case?"

"That you declined to behave wisely when the way was pointed out. I am not unreasonable. I do not ask you to originate wisdom."

"Curse your impudence! Look here, Pellerin—"

"Dear boy, do not be heroic! Nothing is—*worse form!* You see I can indulge in English phrases at need. Well, well, go your own road—if you can find what it is."

"Do you know what you are like?" cried Mayne. "You are a big, bloated spider, lying in wait for just such blundering bluebottles as I am."

"Very likely, little Gerard. You are always so witty, so apt in your comparisons! I am a spider; so be it! Well, you are not the only fly in my web, dear infant, and I can afford to let you go. I watch your escape with composure—you do not even make a hole in my net; and I—I turn to the other side where the prettiest fly—"

"Damn you!" muttered Mayne, in his native tongue.

"I understand, though I do not speak English," returned Monsieur Pellerin in his softest tones; "if I did, I would not for the world make use of such coarse words. It is also very ill-bred and very English to interrupt. You said I was a spider—I spoke of a fly. I hope your charming cousin is quite well, little Gerard? I spoke—"

"I tell you that you may do your worst! Sooner or later you would be sure to do it. I

shall gain nothing by temporizing; the crash may as well come one day as another."

"I do not agree with you. Looking at your position dispassionately, and from an abstract point of view, each day gained is a great deal in your favour," Monsieur Pellerin said, calmly.

"I shall not gain a single one—no, not an hour—by such rascality as you propose!" cried Mayne.

"No?" asked Pellerin, in a mocking voice. "Then get out of my web! Henceforth I devote my attention to another of the foolish flies—such a pretty fly! Dear boy, you are only a blundering bluebottle in comparison!"

"You do not dare—"

Pellerin interrupted the speech by a burst of hearty, genuine laughter.

"If I have any knowledge whatsoever of my friend Antoine," said he, while Mayne stood speechless with rage, "there is nothing at which he will stop when once he has made up his mind."

Mayne turned away, and began walking to and fro across the room. Pellerin busied himself arranging some papers on the table, all the while watching his companion from under his downcast eyelids. Twice Mayne stopped

in his rapid march—seemed about to speak—checked the words, and resumed his promenade. Presently he paused near his host, and said, quietly enough,—

"What an orderly fellow you are!"

"Am I not?" returned Pellerin, smiling pleasantly. "Come, I am glad to see you more like yourself; let us be done with disagreeable subjects. Will you spend the day here, and dine with me?"

"No, thanks; I must go back to Sainton by the next train—I really must! I would stay willingly if I could, provided you would promise to be amiable."

"Dear boy, as if I ever wished to be anything else if I could possibly avoid it," returned Monsieur Pellerin in an injured tone. "You know very well that I like you better than almost any man of my acquaintance."

"I really believe you do," said Mayne, taking a cigar from the table; "and yet you would ruin me without hesitation."

Pellerin offered him a light from his own Havana, and replied in the softest voice,—

"Of course I should, if it was absolutely necessary; but an unpleasantness of the sort would be the fault of destiny or your obstinacy."

"Oh, come, don't begin all that over again!" cried Mayne, impatiently.

"So the journey to England proved a failure?" Pellerin asked, in an interested, friendly way. "The dear relative did not prove propitious?"

"Propitious!"

"What a stony-hearted old lady she is, to be sure!"

"Of all obstinate women that ever lived she is the most impossible!" exclaimed Mayne. "She is the wickedest too—like your good people in general, for that matter."

"English air has made you misanthropic," said Pellerin. "Well, well, dear boy, luckily there is no necessity for you to be distressed."

"You mean there is not, if—"

"Just so; *if!*"

"Then I will not. I tell you so again!" cried Mayne, violently. "I'll have nothing to do with your schemes, no matter what happens to me! I refuse distinctly—do you hear?"

"The very workmen in the factory will hear if you shout so loud," replied Pellerin, with unshaken composure and good-humour. "You know very well that I shall not lose my patience unless you force me to."

"Confound your patience!" retorted Mayne. "I am going; there is no use of our talking any longer."

"I think my phaeton must be at the door by this time; let me drive you to the station," said Pellerin.

Mayne consented. It was in keeping with the character of the two men that they should converse pleasantly during their drive upon all sorts of indifferent topics. There was not another allusion to the vexed questions which had, early in their interview, threatened a quarrel. They parted with perfect friendliness, and each went his way, Mayne putting thought aside with that singular faculty he possessed, and Pellerin so thoroughly decided upon the course he meant to take, that further meditation was unnecessary.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE WOOD.

THE judgment passed by Gerard Mayne upon his relative during that conversation with Monsieur Pellerin was severe, yet it had its truthful side. Mrs. Mayne was Gerard's step-grandmother. When the grandfather died he left a will which was, considering all the circumstances, about as unjust a testament as any elderly mortal ever executed. The framing of this precious document had been entirely due to his wife's influence, which was boundless from first to last.

Gerard naturally had grown up with the expectation of being his grandfather's heir. He was three-and-twenty when the old gentleman took his departure from this lower sphere. Instead of finding himself in free and full possession of the fortune which ought to have been his, Gerard discovered that he had for his present share an allowance of six hundred pounds a year, and the pleasure of submitting

still to Mrs. Mayne's autocratic wishes, unmodified by any possibility of secretly appealing to his grandfather's weakness as he had formerly been able to do.

The whole property belonged to Mrs. Mayne for her lifetime, and though the will stipulated that it was ultimately to revert to Gerard, there were so many conditions imposed, such latitude given to the widow, that she could, if she saw fit, leave the greater part away from him.

Mrs. Mayne believed herself a thoroughly religious woman; she was only a fanatic. She loved power more than anything in the world, money next; and after these came probably her affection for Gerard. She certainly was fonder of him than she had ever been of any human being. She had married while the boy was still a child—an orphan even then, and living in his grandfather's house. Gerard's cousin Effie had also been a resident under the ancestral roof; but though motherless and fatherless the same as Gerard, her melancholy condition had by no means appealed so strongly to the new wife's feelings; in fact, did not in the least affect her in her dealings with the girl.

Effie had been old enough when her grand-

father married to rise in rebellion. Mrs. Mayne detested her, and Effie returned the sentiment with energy. Fortunately neither of them was violent or given to scenes, so the constant warfare they waged did not render the old gentleman's home the purgatory which most women would have made it by their quarrels. But they certainly managed to torment each other sufficiently. They were so opposite in every characteristic, mental and moral, that, even had they tried, it would have been difficult to avoid disagreements—but they never did try.

Mrs. Mayne was uncompromising in her truthfulness—unpleasantly so. Effie seldom told downright lies, but more seldom still the exact truth in regard to any matter. Her grandmother delighted in making her prevarications apparent. Effie was equally clear-sighted in regard to the elderly lady's weaknesses, and exposed them without mercy, displaying a skill and refined cruelty in her assaults which her grandmother could feel keenly enough, though she could neither parry nor imitate it.

It was a happy hour for Mrs. Mayne when Effie, having reached womanhood, took the moderate competency she inherited from a

maternal relative, and went off to live in Italy with some distant connexions who hated the despotic dame as sorely as she did.

Fond as she was of him, Mrs. Mayne did not care to have Gerard reside with her after her widowhood left her free to arrange her life exactly according to her peculiar ideas. She lived like a hermit in her gloomy old Yorkshire mansion—paying few visits—receiving few guests—going about among the poor and doing good in a fashion which caused unregenerate human nature to loathe her and her benefits. In the winter she read prayers to her household by candle-light; dined off cold meat three days in the week; believed laughter a sin, and was firm in the pleasant credence that children were born utterly depraved, and at least three-fourths of mankind predestined to undergo eternal punishment. Yet she expected those unfortunates to be as thankful to their Maker as any heir of grace, certain in advance that an eternity of happiness awaited him, could possibly have been, and would have considered their refusal or inability only another proof of their wickedness and the wisdom of God in appointing hell their portion from the outset.

She would have liked Gerard to become a dissenting minister, and prayed a great deal

for the purpose of bringing about that desirable result, but it was denied her. Failing in her efforts to induce him to accept this calling, she had condemned him to remain an idler. The will would not permit him to enter the army or go into business. Mrs. Mayne considered business vulgar in the extreme.

Roman Catholics were regarded by Mrs. Mayne as the legitimate offspring and future prey of the devil, so the will contained a clause whereby the young man would be excluded from the inheritance in case he were to marry a member of that faith. Mrs. Mayne had persuaded her husband to insert this stipulation because Effie on her marriage became a Romanist. Neither of her grandparents ever noticed her afterward. Mrs. Mayne probably was not aware of the fact, but in her heart she was glad to have this proof that her old belief as to Effie's belonging to the predestined eternal sufferers had been correct.

Twice each year Gerard paid his grandmother a visit; the rest of the time he usually spent on the Continent, more because he could make his limited income go further there than from any fancy he had for exiling himself. Shortly before his death the grandfather paid the young man's debts; since then, Mrs.

Mayne had occasionally advanced him money in cases of pressing need, but the last time she assisted him she had vowed not to do so again, and such bitter words passed between them that they had never been quite on such friendly terms as before. During the visit from which he had just returned, Mayne had not even ventured, troubled as he was, to broach the subject of his present difficulties.

She meant to be a just woman—Gerard believed this, thereby showing a power of forbearance which few persons could have equalled. He knew that her will was made in his favour, but he knew also that if he offended her too deeply she would change it unhesitatingly, and convince herself that she was right in so doing. Mayne thought now that if he could only get free from Monsieur Pellerin's control he should be prepared to eschew follies or pleasures of any kind, and lead the life of an anchorite. Unfortunately the matters between them involved something beyond the mere money question.

Six months before, when Gerard was in trouble about the sums lost at cards, Pellerin had drawn him into a transaction the nature of which he did not realize at the time—if that doubtful plea can be considered any excuse. But in truth he had been half mad

from a fear of not being able to meet those so-called debts of honour; he had grasped recklessly at the plan Pellerin offered, and when reason came back found himself at his friend Antoine's mercy.

Since then Mayne's life would have been almost unendurable to many men, but his singular capability of setting thought aside had stood him in good stead. He could feel his wrong-doing keenly enough when any circumstance brought the memory to his mind, but unless absolutely forced to reflect upon his conduct he was able to get away from the recollection as he might have done from some tiresome acquaintance.

Once out of Pellerin's sight he put resolutely by any reflection in regard to their conversation of the morning. To do what the man desired was out of his power; he would not have consented in any case, not even to save himself from the utter ruin with which he had been threatened. But it was not for Pellerin's interest to ruin him at present. Mayne knew this, and counted upon the fact. Pellerin depended on his assistance in certain social matters, for the sugar-maker had an ambition and a firm determination to rank as something different from a mere man of business who had

shown acuteness and energy enough to accumulate a fortune.

He had already made considerable progress in his wishes, in a great measure through Mayne, and while he could use this heedless young gentleman in any way there was no danger that he would openly injure his victim, and Mayne was only too glad to temporize and escape for the time—very probably the crash must come one day, but there was no good in suffering its pangs by anticipation.

Monsieur Pellerin was a man who indulged in active animosities, but there was no created being he hated as he did Armand de Vieuxville. The Marquis had wounded his vanity, and Pellerin could never forgive that. He had an ardent desire to gain a position in society, and once, in Paris, De Vieuxville had exposed his pretence in claiming relationship with the Breton family, and Pellerin had been laughed at. He could more easily have pardoned a horsewhipping—provided he had received the chastisement in secret.

Sainton was too far from Rouen for Monsieur Pellerin to lay claim to belonging to the neighbourhood, but he had managed to gain a certain foothold there. He had forced Mayne—or persuaded him, the other word is too harsh

to employ in regard to a man with such silky manners as Monsieur Pellerin possessed—to introduce him to the De Marsans, and through them he had established a visiting acquaintance among most of the people worth knowing. His manners were good enough, and he possessed the sycophant's faculty of being submissive and fawning when it was for his interest, so even several of the great Legitimist families received him, and as decayed greatness likes to be flattered, Pellerin was popular in a way.

"An appreciative person," pronounced decayed greatness, "and not in the slightest degree presuming."

So there was nothing to surprise anybody in the fact of Monsieur Pellerin's being seen in Sainton a couple of days after Mayne's visit to his counting-house. He paid his respects at three or four houses—at De Marsan's among the rest.

"All was fish that came to Effie's net"—if you will pardon the vulgar proverb—and Pellerin knew how to render himself agreeable, or at least endurable, to that clear-headed little lady, who had always as many schemes on foot as Monsieur Antoine himself, and could never tell from what quarter she might want assistance.

It chanced that while he was there Honour Pemberton drove up to the house, and he was presented. He established an acquaintance with the widow, and Monsieur Pellerin was a good deal fascinated. He had long thought favourably of matrimony, but just the person he could have wished to meet with failed to come within his reach. It occurred to our friend Antoine that he had at last found the very lady for whom he had been in search, and he elected to consider himself in love with the American.

But though this new turn in his destiny might materially change his plans in the future, Monsieur Pellerin did not waver one jot from the line of conduct he had laid down for the present.

So it came about that Gracieuse Galais, walking at sunset through the wood which stretched toward the sea at the left of her home, found herself suddenly face to face with the amiable Antoine.

She knew him sufficiently to bow, and having gone through that ceremony was continuing her walk, but without apology he joined her, and sauntered on by her side.

"I was sorry, Mademoiselle, to hear that your father had been quite indisposed," he said, in his most mellifluous accents; "I trust that he is recovering."

"Thanks; he is very well again," she replied, looking up rather wonderingly. She had never in her life exchanged twenty words with Monsieur Pellerin, nor, to the best of her knowledge, were her father and he on terms nearer approaching intimacy.

"I am glad to hear it," he said; "exceedingly glad! Monsieur Galais is growing elderly; he ought to lead a very quiet life. Any excitement—trouble—sudden shock—might prove dangerous."

Gracieuse gave him a glance of mingled anger and reproach. Her southern temper could strike fire easily on occasion. She was angered by the impertinent side of Pellerin's speech, and hurt by its cruelty.

"None is likely to come to him," she answered, in a tone divided between haughtiness and petulance, while her lip quivered like that of a frightened child.

"Are you sure?" asked Pellerin, meaningly.

"Why do you speak to me in this way, Monsieur?" she cried. "I scarcely know you—I think you have no right whatever to address me! Will you be good enough to let me go on alone?"

"I dislike being abrupt—there is nothing

that is such bad style," said Pellerin, apologetically; "but under the circumstances I am obliged. It is really necessary that we should have a little conversation, Mademoiselle. I could, of course, have called at your house; but, as I said, your father ought not to be subjected to agitation of any sort, so I thought it better to take the opportunity of speaking with you alone."

She was thoroughly subdued now, and terribly alarmed. Her limbs trembled under her; she tried to speak, but could not frame a syllable.

Almost without volition on her part, she seated herself on a fallen tree trunk that lay beside the path, staring up at him with a white face and terrified eyes.

"Thanks—I was sure Mademoiselle would be too good-natured to refuse," he said, apparently unconscious of her fright, and affecting to believe that she had sat down because quite willing to listen.

"I don't know what you mean," she stammered; "I think you are very rude."

"I would not be for the world," he answered, with undisturbed composure. "You would do me so much justice if you knew me better—as I trust you will learn to do."

She looked up at him with an angry flash in her eyes; he returned her glance with a sort of respectful compassion in his face which startled while it angered her.

"Monsieur is too kind," said she, haughtily, though her breath came quickly, and she studied his countenance with a troubled astonishment which she could not hide.

"Mademoiselle," he continued, in his lowest, softest voice, "I come here as your friend—you know that you need one."

She interrupted him by rising quickly from her seat. Rage gave her a momentary strength—subdued, too, the vague fears which his previous words had roused in her mind.

He rose also, and stood directly in front of her—the same pitying look still in his eyes.

"Monsieur, be good enough to let me pass," she said.

He did not move; he took some papers from the breast-pocket of his coat, unfolded one of them, and held it before her, so that she could not avoid reading a portion of what was written on the page. While she stared at the lines with wild, dilated eyes, he went on, almost in a whisper.

"A friend—you need one, and you will find such in me. Trust me, Mademoiselle—for

your own sake—for the sake of others. No. No one can aid you as I will—not even your father—not Monsieur de Vieuxville himself."

Gracieuse stretched out her hands, with an imploring cry, and fell on her knees, at his feet.

"For God's sake!" she moaned, "for God's sake!"

She tried to speak coherently. In spite of her efforts, her lips could only frame that agonized prayer, uttered it again and again, each repetition growing fuller of terror and anguish.

"I beg you will rise, mademoiselle," he said, quietly; "there is no necessity for this agitation. I have already told you that I come here willing and eager to be your friend."

But she did not stir; she could not; could only crouch there at his feet, moaning,—

"For God's sake! for God's sake!"

He raised her very gently—gently as a woman could have done—placed her on the log again, obliged her to lean back against the trunk of a tree, and seated himself beside her.

"You only pain me, and do yourself great harm, by giving way to this agitation," he said. "It is perfectly uncalled for. For good

or for evil, I never break my word. I have said that I can help you. I promise now to do so. Are you content?"

"What do you want?" she asked, in a hoarse, broken voice, like the voice of an old woman. Her great eyes were fastened on his face. There seemed a fascination in his glance from which she could not free herself, though the horror in her look was like the dread with which one might stare at a ghost. "What do you want?"

"I shall tell you," he replied, calm as ever; "but you must compose yourself, else you cannot listen."

"I am listening," she said, a wild impatience breaking through the fright and anguish of her face. "Go on, tell me what you want."

He began, and for many moments continued speaking in a slow, measured tone. At first it was only by a great effort that she could keep herself quiet. She clenched her hands over the log; dug her nails deep into the bark; her breath came in short, quick gasps; she looked like the phantom of the beautiful girl into whose presence this man had so unexpectedly brought the black shadow of his plots —the cold ferocity of his relentless will.

Gradually her feverish agitation gave way to a dull, chill apathy—the quiet of utter hopelessness and despair. Never once did her eyes leave his face. Many times she tried to look away, but she could no more do it than a bird fascinated by a serpent could escape. At last, with one low groan, she buried her head in her shawl. The sound—so full of mortal agony that it might have touched a fiend—passed him unheeded; not because the hardness of his nature rendered him insensible to suffering—he was by no means a fiend, and could feel acutely in certain ways—but because he was so occupied with the errand which had caused him to seek her that he had no room in his mind to take cognizance of her suffering.

He ceased speaking at last, but she did not stir. His words required no answer. She sat dumb. If she could be said to think at all, the one thought that rose distinct amid the confusion of her brain was the relief she found in the silence. It was as if an iron bell had been booming in her ear and ceased suddenly, to leave her stone-deaf to every earthly sound.

Presently she was conscious of wondering if he would speak again, if she must find some reply. She longed to look up. She could not. It seemed to her as if she could never

again face the light of day, the sight of a human being.

Suddenly she grew afraid of the stillness; she wished he would speak; anything would be better than this horrible quiet, which held such a hell of agony in its round.

Then, without a warning, a voice called,—

"Gracieuse, Gracieuse!"

She flung the shawl from off her head, and started to her feet.

Monsieur de Vieuxville was standing before her.

She looked about, expecting to find Pellerin by her side—conscious of wondering how she was later to account for the man's presence—but Pellerin was gone.

She had not known when he left her, but each word uttered by him had burned itself into her brain, until it seemed to her that eternity itself could never blot out a single syllable.

She looked again toward De Vieuxville, marvelling, in a dull fashion, why he seemed so troubled and shaken. If she could have caught a glimpse of her own face she would have understood. It was not only that she was deathly pale, that her eyes were like the

eyes of a dead creature, but above and beyond the despair which countenance and attitude expressed, was a dread, a horror a thousand times more painful. She sank slowly back upon the log.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, his usually calm manner giving way to an agitation startling from the contrast. "Gracieuse, what has happened?"

"Let me alone!" she cried, a sudden passion crossing the pallor of her face. "Let me alone! You make my life a burden. Do you hear?"

"I, Gracieuse?"

"You, you! I hate you!"

Without a word he turned to go.

"No, no," she called; "I did not mean that. You know I did not. But sometimes I would if I could—I would! Ah, I don't know what I am saying! Forgive me—forgive me! O my God! my God!"

She started up. He laid his hand on her arm, uttering her name in a tone of agonized entreaty,—

"Gracieuse, Gracieuse!"

She stood still, and turned her white face toward him.

"If you stop me, if you follow me, I'll kill

myself," she said, in a terrible whisper. "Let me go."

His hand dropped to his side. She rushed away through the dimness of the wood. He stood motionless, looking after her till she was hidden among the shadows.

CHAPTER XII.

THE THREE TOGETHER.

ONLY the next day Mrs. Pemberton visited the factory for the purpose of holding a consultation with the director.

She sat for a long time with Monsieur de Vieuxville. After the business matter which brought her had been arranged, their talk strayed away to themes more congenial and natural between a man and woman still young. Some chance remark of hers caused the Marquis to speak of his mother, and that led them on to conversation so interesting that Honour at least entirely forgot how the time slipped by. At length the entrance of Robert, with a huge package of letters, brought them back to a realization of the fact that they were in the domains of the goddess of labour, and that the strict deity had every reason to be dissatisfied with their conduct.

"I had no idea it was so late," Honour said, rising quickly; "you must have been wishing me at the antipodes for the last hour."

"I ought, I suppose," returned he, with a smile; "but, to the disgrace of my reputation as a business man, I am obliged to admit that I never remembered for a single instant to do so."

"What a deliciously gallant speech!" cried she, gaily, though her colour deepened slightly under his glance.

"But you always insist on the truth," said he.

"Well, I must not stop to hear any more of it just now," she replied. "Good-bye!—I shall see you this evening."

He accompanied her to the door. As he opened it, Gracieuse Galais was crossing the passage. An odd expression passed over the girl's face when she looked up and saw them standing together on the threshold, but she controlled herself, and came forward to greet Mrs. Pemberton. She was composed enough, and spoke pleasantly enough, yet there was a certain restraint, amounting almost to sullenness, visible in her voice and countenance, which would have struck Honour at another time, though now she was too full of her own private reflections to notice it. This morning she and Monsieur de Vieuxville seemed to have made a great advance in their acquaintance—nay, their friendship—she called it this openly

in her mind, and was proud to do so. It gratified her that he began freely to show her his real nature, to talk of himself, and disclose the motives which influenced his commonplace life. She had of late sometimes felt the career he had accepted unworthy his talents and the ambition which he ought to possess; but as he allowed her gradually to understand his reasons therefor, she respected his determination, and admired his patience and energy. So, in the pleasant agitation of her thoughts, Gracieuse's peculiar manner escaped her. She was not exactly conscious of the fact, but she wanted to get away to be alone for a time. Of the feeling which caused this vague desire she was in utter ignorance.

She spoke kindly and cordially to the young girl. Monsieur de Vieuxville moved back a step, and stood in the shadow of the doorway, where he could see Gracieuse's face and hear every word exchanged between the two. Gracieuse did not so much as glance toward him after that first rapid look, which had something both of anger and pain in its intensity.

Honour uttered her friendly speeches, and made a movement to pass, but paused to add,—

"I hope your father is well? I have meant for several days to go and pay him a visit."

"No, he is far from well," Gracieuse replied. "I—I wished to speak to you about that."

Honour hurried speedily down from the enchanted realm of dreams, conscience-stricken at her own selfish absorption.

"You did not tell me!" she said, glancing back at De Vieuxville, with a slight reproach in her tone.

"I did not know it," he answered, in his coldest voice. "He was in his bureau yesterday, Mademoiselle Gracieuse."

"He is always here when he can get out—I suppose everybody about the place is aware of that," returned she, defiantly, though even in replying to his remark she did not turn her eyes toward him.

Monsieur de Vieuxville received the pettish observation in silence; Honour set Gracieuse's rebellious tone and words down to the score of anxiety, and hastened to say,—

"My poor child, you are troubled and alarmed about your father; why did you not let me know? Has he been worse? Are there new symptoms which have frightened you?"

"He is the same as usual," returned Gracieuse, with ill-restrained impatience. "It is only—"

"But has he seen the doctor again?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" She tried to subdue the fretfulness which broke into her voice, and continued more gently: "It is only that he is weak and so easily tired. He says himself that, at least for a while, he is certain he ought to give up work—unless for a little time each day."

"I am sure he ought; I told you so some time since," Honour said. "But do not be worried, my dear; I am certain that, if he takes care of himself, he will be quite strong again by autumn."

"I think so," Gracieuse answered, in an absent way, as if trying to recall some lesson she had learned by heart to repeat. After a momentary hesitation, she resumed: "I cannot leave him so much alone, Madame. You proposed once to have more clerks employed—to—"

"I was speaking of it to Monsieur de Vieuxville a little while ago," returned Honour, moving, as she spoke, so as to bring him into the conversation. "We both thought it ought to be done."

Monsieur stood erect and silent as a stone effigy of one of his crusader ancestors in the old village church.

"I shall be glad," Gracieuse said simply.

"The new refineries and the additional workmen will more than double the duties," continued Honour. "My dear child, I cannot have you wearing your eyes out over those tiresome books. Why, you look quite pale and wretched to-day!"

"I am very well,—perfectly well,—I am always," Gracieuse replied, now trying hard to speak and act in her usual manner. "It was only that I feared you might be vexed."

"What a vandal you must think me!" cried Honour playfully.

"No, no, you are always too good and kind —much too good! You see it is not because I am unwilling to work—I like it—only I cannot leave papa so long; and—and he must let the accounts alone, but he would be hurt if you told him so."

"I understand! My dear Gracieuse, leave the matter to me," Honour said, taking the girl's cold hand between both hers, and patting it softly. "I shall tell him that for the new works there must be new accountants, and so on; and gradually we can relieve him entirely. I should think you, too, would be glad to give up those tiresome ledgers."

"Madame forgets that I have my living to

earn," replied Gracieuse, in a voice divided between pride and irritation.

"Even then I don't see why Madame need be addressed so ceremoniously," said Honour, too full of sympathy for the childish creature to be annoyed. "No, no; I did not forget, little one; but I thought you might like a change of duties: there will be the schools and all sorts of things."

Gracieuse shuddered.

"I would rather starve than teach!" said she.

"Well, on the whole, I think I would," returned Honour, laughing.

"Let me keep my place; I like it. I understand my duties, and I shall not neglect them; nobody can say I do that."

"You shall do just what you please, my dear," said Honour; "only don't worry yourself. I suppose that is not business-like, but it is what I mean;" and she smiled at Monsieur de Vieuxville, who was looking good-naturedly ironical and amused at her speech.

"I can keep up a general supervision of the books, if only there are other clerks," Gracieuse said, quickly turning away her head as she caught the smile exchanged between the two.

"Exactly! Monsieur de Vieuxville will arrange it all. And now, my child, put on your hat and go with me for a drive—the fresh air will do you a world of good."

"Thanks! You are so kind—so kind!"

"Prove you think that by coming."

"I cannot to-day—I am so sorry; indeed I cannot."

"I'll not have you work this morning; you are not fit."

"No, it is not that; but I must stay with papa. Please don't think me rude. Oh, I am ashamed to seem so ungrateful."

She uttered the words with a painful haste; her colour came and went rapidly; her eyes were almost wild in their eager, feverish expression. Honour was greatly disturbed by her appearance and manner, but she tried to speak playfully.

"What an exaggerated way of talking! At least go home, and do not come back to this musty old place for three whole days. Why, if you were to fall ill I should consider it my fault and feel more wicked than a stony-hearted Jew usurer."

"You are so good—so good!" repeated Gracieuse.

"Selfish, you mean," laughed Honour. "I

am fond of roses, and cannot afford to let yours fade in this dusty counting-house. It is all very well to sacrifice Monsieur de Vieuxville to our Moloch; but you and I must take care of our complexions."

Gracieuse attempted to laugh; De Vieuxville uttered one of his dryly humorous speeches, and for a few seconds longer they stood there conversing. Honour's craving for solitude came back—her desire to leave the practical side of existence and forget that such things as care or trouble were; but she achieved a victory over herself which, trifling as it seemed, was just one of these triumphs it is difficult for human nature to attain. After a moment's struggle, she said,—

"Come with me to your house, Mademoiselle Gracieuse; I wish to see your father. I shall settle the whole business this morning."

"But—but—"

"Don't be afraid; I shall not be clumsy! He will himself perceive that no extra duties ought to come on you. *Au revoir*, Monsieur de Vieuxville! Please don't get so covered with sugar-dust that you will forget you are to dine with me to-day. The De Marsans are coming, and your dear, dear friend Madame de Chantal."

De Vieuxville was guilty of making a grimace; he detested the old woman, and Honour knew it, as was evident by her malicious laugh. She had hold still of Gracieuse's hand, and drew the girl on toward the outer doors, nodding a saucy farewell to the Marquis. He followed them so far. Honour bade Joseph drive to Monsieur Galais's house; she would walk there. When the two ladies had gone, De Vieuxville returned to his room. He sat down at his desk, but he did not accomplish much work that morning.

It had been a rule of his to live almost isolated from society, greatly to the dissatisfaction of the neighbourhood, in whose eyes the traditions concerning the De Vieuxvilles were strong enough to make this last representative of the family an important personage, however poor he might be; and besides this, he was too agreeable to be willingly left to stand aloof in a quiet place where young men did not form a preponderant social element. But he had begun by accepting Honour's invitations since they reached terms of friendliness, and every now and then he found himself whiled into the acceptance of those of others, chiefly through Mrs. Pemberton's persuasions, as that lady might have been forced to admit

had she chanced to reflect upon the matter, but she did not.

Monsieur de Vieuxville busied himself for some time with the books and his letters; but his thoughts would wander in a fashion to which he was not accustomed. At last he flung down his pen, tore up his abortive attempts at business epistles, and said to himself, half aloud,—

"I did not think you could be such an ass, my friend!"

After this uncomplimentary speech, he put on his hat and went over to the factory, busying himself the whole day with out-of-door matters.

He appeared at Honour Pemberton's dinner, and it was in a great measure owing to his efforts that the evening proved so pleasant as everybody pronounced it.

"I told you he was the most agreeable fellow in the world when you could break through his ice," Léon de Marsan remarked to their hostess, as the adieus were in progress of utterance.

"My dear," laughed Effie, "hereafter you may regard yourself as the most powerful planet in the universe—your smiles have done what the sun could not."

De Marsan treated his wife to a sarcastic

glance, whose meaning she understood, though its significance was lost on Honour. He was quite aware that Effie could not forgive the Marquis for having refused to be subjugated by her witcheries, and liked to show her that he appreciated her feeling.

When her guests had departed, Honour only waited to see Mrs. Somers safe in her nest—the old robin was apt to grow mildly querulous when kept out of it too late—then went on to her own rooms, and was so silent and abstracted during the disrobing process that Céline, the keen-sighted, withdrew her mind from the contemplation of her evening in the servants' hall, and the effect she had produced on Madame de Chantal's new footman, to wonder what had come over her mistress. Honour could not have told why herself, but the dinner gaieties had been very pleasant to her. Every little amusement offered in these days seemed a success, and life in all ways was a thing worth possessing—but she asked no questions of her soul.

As she lay in bed, having reached that happy stage of somnolency where reflections are half dreams, she realized vaguely that she was thinking of Monsieur de Vieuxville, and roused herself, but only long enough to inform her

inward monitor that she had a perfect right to think of him. He was her friend, and real friends did not blossom often enough across the wilderness of existence for one lightly to regard their appearance.

And saying this to her mental guardian, Honour fell fast asleep, and dreamed the most charming visions, wherein her new friend found a place; but that was right and reasonable too—she was quite prepared, when she woke the next morning, to confront her spiritual adviser with this declaration.

I wonder what Mrs. Pemberton would have thought if some clairvoyant power had enabled her to watch Monsieur de Vieuxville after he left her house. He walked across the park to the pavilion he inhabited, let himself in by means of a pass-key, without disturbing his faithful old domestic, and went into his salon.

He smoked for a while, looking graver and sterner than one would have expected his face to grow so soon after his evening's good spirits. Plainly, he had put off his gaiety along with his dinner-coat. He sat down before a quaint cabinet, opened various secret drawers, and took out papers and memorandum-books, over which he pored for hours.

There were many items and notes which Honour would not have understood, or considered any affair of hers; but it might have surprised her somewhat could she have seen that certain of the sheets held the clearest summaries of everything connected with the business which he managed so much to her satisfaction, mixed oddly enough with his private matters. Besides these, there was a document covered with figures and half-written sentences, which he studied more attentively than he had done the others.

On the evening of Honour Pemberton's arrival at the château, she had picked up a paper after Monsieur de Vieuxville's departure; glanced at it—put it away, meaning to restore it to him—then forgot all about it from that time till now.

Could she have compared that sheet with the page Monsieur de Vieuxville sat studying this night in the seclusion of his home, I think Mrs. Pemberton would scarcely have begun the succeeding day in so genial a mood as she was able to do.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WARNING.

THE next morning Honour found she had a horse too many in her stables—the supernumerary one being a staid, serviceable old pony, that certainly had not been seen until Joseph came back from a fair near Rouen on the previous afternoon.

But there the pony was, and a comfortable low carriage belonging to him—and horse and vehicle were very much in Honour's way; she begged Monsieur Galais to keep them for her in the empty *écurie* on his place, and a teamster from the Works was deputed to take care of the animal's wants. So Honour managed to give the old gentleman an opportunity to take a daily airing. She told him that Gracieuse needed the relaxation, and she told Gracieuse it was necessary for her father's health, thereby silencing any expostulation or scruple on the part of either.

Gracieuse could handle the reins very neatly,

and after a certain struggle with herself in regard to accepting a favour from Madame Pemberton—a feeling which had suddenly sprung up in her mind—she was as pleased as a child with the new possession. The first time she drove her father was to go to the château, in order that he might tell its châtelaine how thoroughly he appreciated her thoughtful kindness.

Gerard Mayne chanced to be sitting with Honour when they arrived. He had come to make his adieus; he was going to set out the next morning for Bavaria, and would be absent a fortnight or three weeks. His grandmother possessed property there, and Mayne made a yearly visit, for the purpose of collecting rents and attending to such matters as might require looking after.

"I have no head for business, but I can manage to do so much," he said to Honour, after explaining his proposed departure.

"I wish you could not," returned she, laughing; "your going away interferes with my plans. I was just thinking it high time I offered some return for all the hospitality that has been lavished on me. I mean to give a ball—a real ball! What am I to do if one of the chief *valseurs* deserts me in this cruel fashion?"

"But you could not well be prepared before a fortnight," he said; "I will promise to be ready to do my duty in dancing to any extent by that time, even if I have to damage the grandmother's interests to a frightful degree."

"Very well; you are not to forget! I will be generous and give you sixteen days' grace, provided you are back then," said she.

"I swear!" he exclaimed, in the same merrily theatrical way she had spoken, and rather impertinently (only he did everything with a manner so graceful, that it is a harsh word to apply) took her hand, and was about to seal the compact by pressing his lips thereon, when the door opened, and the appalling major domo—still Honour's nightmare—announced Monsieur and Mademoiselle Galais. Honour would not have minded their entrance so much, but as soon as Pierre had uttered those names, he caught his breath, and added,—

"Monsieur de Chantal."

Sure enough, there was handsome Arthur walking into the room in the wake of the father and daughter, and Honour had already seen sufficient of the young gentleman to know that, in spite of Effie de Marsan's declaring him "the nicest boy living," he was an inveterate gossip, and always repeated everything

he heard or saw, and, like most people with that proclivity, he did it in a way which totally misinterpreted the most trifling matters. Honour was not given to letting her hand be kissed, nor was she on the verge of a flirtation with Mayne, though since his return from England he had been rather marked in his attentions. She was vexed with him for placing her in a predicament which bordered upon the absurd, and downright angry with poor De Chantal for having been a witness thereof. As for Monsieur Galais and Gracieuse, she could easily have explained the position to them; but to Monsieur Arthur she might explain till she grew black in the face, he would hold to his own opinion; and the more she averred, the more he would be sure the state of affairs meant "business," and the greater would become his eagerness to repeat what he had seen.

Honour rose, greeted the old gentleman and his daughter with great cordiality, and was ungenerous enough to offer De Chantal, as a welcome,—

"Is not your mamma with you? I hope she is well?" as if he had been a small boy whom she was surprised to see out alone.

De Chantal was young enough to feel the

thrust, and Mayne added to his annoyance by smiling, with the usual ill-nature of a man of twenty-six toward a youth four years his junior. The worst of it was, Master Arthur had come with a message from his mother, which must be delivered, and, in his momentary confusion, he blurted it out, as if giving an excuse for his appearance, and was still more vexed by seeing Gracieuse smile too.

That pretty creature was looking as lovely as possible to-day. As she came into the room, the colour had rushed into her cheeks, and a shy, startled expression into her eyes. She was not accustomed to paying visits, and very probably may have been a little nervous. She was simply dressed, but with a daintiness and taste which a duchess might have envied.

For a few moments Monsieur Galais engrossed the hostess's attention, and the young men devoted themselves to Gracieuse. Arthur was sulky, but he did not mean to be put down by his friend Mayne. He had known Gracieuse for years; Monsieur Galais had superintended his studies before he entered college; and he was so near the girl's age, and she had been acquainted with him so long, that it was perhaps easier, in her nervousness, to talk with him than with Mayne, so she rather turned the cold

shoulder upon the latter, and restored De Chantal's good humour. But Mayne was neither young enough nor old enough to be nettled by Gracieuse's manner. He left the field to Arthur, contented himself with turning admiring eyes upon the young lady, as he always did upon every pretty woman who chanced to come within his range of vision, and when he spoke tried rather to appease De Chantal's hurt vanity than to ingratiate himself with Gracieuse.

After a while Honour took Monsieur Galais out into the gardens, to have his opinion of some alterations she had been making. Of course the others followed; Mayne walked on one side of Mrs. Pemberton, and allowed De Chantal to follow with Mademoiselle Galais.

Presently Arthur took his leave. Honour repented her momentary annoyance, and completed the healing of his wounded dignity by her complimentary speeches. They had been examining some marvels of colour in the way of Japanese lilies lately brought out of the green-house, and after De Chantal's departure Gracieuse still stood looking at them, and Mayne waited also, though her father and Honour had walked on, and were lost to view by a turn in the path.

When Gracieuse perceived that she was alone with Mayne, she turned to follow the other two, but he said, quickly,—

"Please, do not go."

"I am sure you have studied the flowers long enough," returned she, laughing; though somehow to-day her laughter had lost the gay, girlish ring which usually made it so sweet.

Mayne's face was very grave; it had grown so while she was bending over the lilies, unconscious of his scrutiny.

"I wanted to speak to you," he said, in the hesitating way in which one is apt to speak when one has something to say to a friend which may be considered in the light of a liberty, though of sufficient importance, so that it must be uttered even at the risk of giving offence. "I meant to go to your house from here."

"That would have been very good of you," replied Gracieuse, laughing still, though evidently ill at ease; "but you would have found us dreadfully dull after your morning in Madame Pemberton's society."

"I was at Rouen yesterday," Mayne continued, steadily, yet with an effort.

"That is not so remarkable a pilgrimage

that one need offer you congratulations upon your safe return," said she, still more discomposed.

"I saw Monsieur Pellerin," he said, in a low voice.

She gave him a startled, rebellious look; there was a certain fright visible in it too. She turned her face away, as she answered,—

"I suppose anybody who likes may go to see him; for my part, I should not wish to. He is an excessively disagreeable person; besides, I hardly know him."

Mayne smiled at her childish petulance, but his usually *insouciant* countenance did not lose the grave, troubled expression it had assumed when he found himself alone with Gracieuse.

"I know that he saw my cousin last Tuesday, and you also."

"Yes; I happened to meet him while I was out walking," she replied, with a composure of voice belied by the trouble in her eyes. "Do talk of something else; I tell you I think he is an odious man."

"He is more than that," returned Mayne, frowning, as he recalled his last interview with that unscrupulous personage. "But never mind! I want to say one thing—I must say it! Do not you be persuaded or fright-

ened into yielding to any of Monsieur Pellerin's schemes, whatever they may be."

"I have nothing to do with him or his schemes," she said, angrily; "and, what is more, I am not likely to have. I don't know what you mean."

"I am very glad if you do not," he answered; "I hope you will be careful to keep as ignorant."

He was about to add further warnings, but, with true feminine quickness, she hastened to carry the war into the enemy's camp.

"What do you think Monsieur de Chantal told me?" cried she.

"Something asinine, no doubt; the amiable Arthur's speeches usually come under that head."

"Oh, I don't know that," retorted Gracieuse; "he is always kind and good natured, at all events. But he said—"

"Well?"

"That everybody declares you are paying court to Madame Pemberton."

"De Chantal is an utter fool!" cried Mayne.

"Oh, oh! There must be some truth in his story, else you would not let it vex you," exclaimed Gracieuse, teasingly. "How very

indiscreet we all were to enter the room just when we did. I thought papa ought to have apologized for our intrusion."

Anxious as he was, Mayne could not help laughing.

"But never mind that idiot of an Arthur," he said; "Monsieur Pellerin is—"

"Not an idiot, but of no importance," she interrupted; "I do not care to talk or think about him."

"You must make him no promises—you must have nothing to do with him," continued Mayne hurriedly. "I warn you, Gracieuse Galais, he is a most dangerous man."

A burning flush overspread her cheeks—faded, and left her very pale.

"All the world seems to think they have the right to lecture me," cried she, passionately; "I'll not endure it!"

"You know—you must know—"

"Let me alone!" she broke in, childish even at the height of her trouble and anger. "Let me alone! I will not be directed or watched. I am quite able to take care of myself."

"So much the better," he said, in an odd, choked voice; "so much the better."

"Indeed, indeed, you may be sure of it," returned she, her petulance changing to a

sudden earnestness: she was evidently determined to set his mind at ease; to free herself from any watchfulness on his part. "I am not a baby; if it came to the point, Monsieur Pellerin might find a woman's wit more than a match for all his craft and astuteness."

Mayne's face cleared—he looked and felt relieved.

"I know your wits are quick enough and keen enough," he said.

"At least so that I need not fear Monsieur Pellerin," rejoined she.

"He hates De Vieuxville," continued Mayne, "he has reason perhaps—at all events he would do anything in his power to injure him—anything."

The mention of that name brought back Gracieuse's agitation.

"And I," she exclaimed, "would do anything—"

At this moment they heard Honour's voice calling,—

"Where are you two young people? I want you to go to the greenhouse with us! Gracieuse!"

The girl turned to go: Mayne touched her arm.

"Anything?" he repeated.

She threw off his hand, and hurried away, but

as she ran along the path she finished the sentence to herself,—

"To save the man I love! to save the man I love!"

Mayne did not overtake the trio until they had reached the doors of the greenhouse. He remained with them for a few moments, but neither he nor Gracieuse spoke much, though Honour and Monsieur Galais were too deep in discussions regarding horticultural matters to notice their unusual silence.

Presently Mayne made his adieus and went away. As he shook hands with Gracieuse, he slipped into her hand a bit of paper, on which he had scribbled a few lines.

She had no opportunity to read his message until she reached home.

"I shall come to your house this evening. If De Vieuxville—"

Gracieuse read no further; at sight of that name she tore the paper into fragments, flung them on the floor, and stamped angrily upon them. Another moment, and she burst into a passion of tears, stooped and began carefully gathering up the scattered bits, as if afraid that even yet some sentence or word might remain sufficiently legible to betray her secret—her secret or another's.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MISSING TELEGRAM.

THE twentieth of June arrived; a day so beautiful that it was a *fête* of itself—gotten up, everybody told Honour Pemberton, expressly to show approval of the festivities taking place in her dominions.

The agreement with the farmers had been completed; the additional crops sown which would enable De Vieuxville to supply the large contracts he was effecting; the new buildings were ready for use, and the fresh troop of workmen established in the cottages arranged for their reception.

Honour had plenty of occupation on her hands, and life looked very bright to her. She had numerous projects to carry out, and had found both Monsieur de Vieuxville and the curé invaluable coadjutors; as for old Monsieur Galais, she gave him so much to do in the way of giving advice and listening to her schemes, that he scarcely had leisure to notice that his

office-duties had gradually more and more to devolve upon others, owing to pure physical inability to fulfil them.

Schools were set on foot; a private hospital was in progress, so that, in case of illness among the men or their children, the sick could find proper treatment instead of being left to the care of unskilled or ignorant wives and mothers. A number of sisters of charity had been procured, to act as teachers and nurses, and the whole arrangements were in such admirable working order, that Léon de Marsan laughingly told Honour he thought she was quite anxious to have a pestilence break out in the neighbourhood, in order that the perfection of her plans might be fully tested.

So to-day the new era was fitly inaugurated by a feast to the *employés* and their families, and all the grandees, far and near, condescended to grace the occasion by their presence. A party of Honour's Parisian friends were stopping at the château; nearly all the neighbouring houses held guests too, so that altogether the day's proceedings attracted a great deal of attention, and were duly chronicled afterward in the newspapers, to Mrs. Pemberton's extreme annoyance. There was a luncheon for the great people, as well as dinner for the workmen

and their kind. Toasts were given, and Honour's health drunk, and speeches made, wherein she heard herself compared to so many wonderful personages, that, as she whispered to Effie de Mansan, she did not feel quite sure whether she was Penthesilea or Penelope, Joan of Arc or Mrs. Fry, or some sort of monster of perfection formed out of an impossible mingling of the whole crowd.

But, though she laughed, she enjoyed the day thoroughly, and she could see her own contentment reflected in Monsieur de Vieuxville's face, a fact which added to her satisfaction more than she was aware.

Antoine Pellerin was present too, so affable and good humoured that it would have been difficult to believe the success of the rival Works caused him a single pang.

It was after sunset when the grand people made their adieus to Mrs. Pemberton, and drove away, leaving the peasants and their ilk to a dance in one of the new buildings.

"You look tired," Monsieur de Vieuxville said, as he came up to her when the last of the guests had departed.

"Yes; but it has been a complete success, has it not?"

"Very satisfactory," he answered, in his quiet way.

"Oh, you may be as philosophical as you like, I know you are pleased," returned she, gaily. "But I must get home now; poor Mrs. Somers is quite worn out."

That lady was reposing herself on the bench by Honour's side, near the counting-house.

"I am so thankful it is over without anything blowing up," sighed she. "Every time a champagne cork popped, I thought we were all going to explode."

"Well, we will get home," Honour said, kindly. "Just wait one minute. I see Monsieur Galais and Gracieuse yonder; I must go say good night to the dear old gentleman."

Monsieur de Vieuxville remained patiently listening to the elder lady's platitudes, though his eyes wandered toward the spot where Honour was standing. But he gave no other sign of inattention to his companion, answering all her remarks, and sympathizing decorously with her in her fear of Works.

"Wait, wait!" Honour called, as she ran across the lawn in a very undignified fashion. "Dear Monsieur Galais, I have not thanked you half enough for all your help."

The new cousin was in company—Dr. Jean Chegary from Bayonne. He had arrived the night before, and Honour had found time to-day to make his acquaintance,—a genial, open-faced young man, who pleased her greatly; and even while saying agreeable things to Monsieur Galais, she was hoping that Gracieuse's fanciful little heart might go out in a direction so desirable.

But Gracieuse just now looked too listless and weary to care about cousins, or lovers either, and was less attentive to Dr. Jean's conversation than an *exigeant* man would have required.

"My dear girl," Honour said, "I am sure you are tired to death. So is everybody, for that matter, except Monsieur Galais here. He looks as fresh as possible."

"I think my head aches," Gracieuse replied.

"We must all go home now," returned Honour. "Good night, Dr. Jean; I am very happy to have made your acquaintance. Monsieur and Gracieuse must bring you to the château."

So she went back to her relative, and the others walked on toward the house, the two men voluble in praise of Madame Pemberton. But Gracieuse was too tired to praise any-

body; and though Dr. Jean refrained from annoying her by remark, he observed her very narrowly, and came to the conclusion that either his pretty cousin was less strong than could be wished, or that some mental anxiety was preying upon her.

He thought about it a good deal that evening after he had gone to his room, and, brief as had been his opportunity of observation, a dread that he had reached the truth started up in his mind, though he tried to put it aside. The idea of marrying Gracieuse had been his dream almost from the time she was a child and he a boy at the *lycée*. He had seen her on several occasions, and he loved her with all the earnestness of his manly, honest heart.

"We can leave you at your hermitage as we drive home," Honour said to Monsieur de Vieuxville when she returned to the bench.

But he declined. He would wait for awhile. He wanted to talk a little with some of the new men.

"Perhaps you mean to tell me you have forgotten you are to dine with us?" retorted Honour, laughing. "Be good enough not to shirk responsibilities. I am too tired and stupid to have the entertainment of those people left entirely on my hands."

"Dinner is not until half-past eight," he replied. "It is barely seven now; I shall have plenty of time."

"Very well. At least admit you are pleased," said she. "Your pet Moloch yonder is fully alive in his strength at last."

He answered her jestingly, helped her into the carriage after Mrs. Somers, and watched them drive away. Then he went into the counting-house, and entered his private room. The day had held one disappointment for him, but he had not chosen to speak of it to Mrs. Pemberton, and he was displeased with himself for feeling a trifle so much.

The truth was, his arrangements with the Bristol and Glasgow firms had gone so far that he had hoped on this day to receive a telegram announcing that everything was settled; and he had meant to offer the news to Honour as the crowning success of the *fête*, and the proof that in every way his plans, to which she had so readily acceded, were founded on a sure basis.

But the telegram had not come. After all, he might not hear for several days. There was nothing to be anxious about. On the table in his office lay several letters. He looked them over—commonplace, business

epistles. He was annoyed, however, at finding them, for he had given strict orders to several of his subordinates that any letters which arrived should be brought to him at once, whether he were at the luncheon-table or elsewhere. The wished-for despatch was not among this pile, but it might have been. Moreover, Monsieur de Vieuxville was a man who insisted upon implicit obedience, and this inattention to a command was a thing he could with difficulty forgive, even upon a day when the excitement of pleasure might have rendered a little forgetfulness on the part of the new clerks somewhat excusable.

There was nobody in the counting-house, except the watchman occupied in closing the building for the night. De Vieuxville met him in the passage.

"Did you receive the letters?" he asked the man, not quite certain whether he had given the same instructions to old Robert that he had done to the clerks.

"No, Monsieur; I have not seen the post man to-day. Did Monsieur expect letters which have not come?"

"No; I found them in my room," De Vieuxville replied. "I only wished to know who took them in."

"It was not I, Monsieur."

De Vieuxville nodded and passed on. Robert had held his place for years, and his fidelity and truth had grown into a proverb. The matter was settled so far as concerned him.

He walked up to the building where the people were dancing. The new clerks were there, condescending to choose for partners the daughters of the neighbouring farmers, who had been invited to join the *fête*. De Vieuxville managed to speak to each of the accountants in turn. Considering the circumstances, he meant to overlook the fault; but the man who had committed it would be a marked individual, and the next infraction of his law by so much as a hair's breadth would be the signal for the unfortunate losing his position.

However he gained no information. Either they were all innocent, or the man who had forgotten to obey orders was screening himself under a falsehood. The latter most probably.

As De Vieuxville neared Monsieur Galais's house, he saw Gracieuse in the grounds. He opened the gate, and walked toward her.

"I thought you had gone to dine at Madame's," she said.

"I am going," he answered. "You look tired."

"I am," she said, "and very cross." Then, as if she wished to apologize for her petulant tone, she added, laughingly, "Judging from the expression of his face, I should say Monsieur de Vieuxville shared in the latter sensation."

"I am annoyed," he replied, then hesitated for an instant.

"Annoyances are the lot of mankind," she said, curtly, without asking explanation as to the cause of his special vexation.

If Monsieur de Vieuxville had approached Gracieuse intending to ask if she could throw any light upon what had happened, he changed his mind.

"You are slightly misanthropic to-night," was all he said, the sarcastic smile which, in the outset of their acquaintance, had so often irritated Honour Pemberton, curling his lip as he spoke. "I have scarcely seen the new cousin yet. Do you like him?"

Gracieuse gave him a reproachful glance, and burst into tears.

"You never meet me now without trying to hurt me," she cried, passionately. "It is cruel, it is wicked! When you know, as well as I do, what he has come here for. When you know—Oh, I'll not talk to you!"

Before he could speak, she dashed up the

path. De Vieuxville walked homeward, taking a short cut through the park.

Unfortunately Dr. Jean witnessed the brief interview, and saw Gracieuse crying. Altogether he had sufficient food for meditation that night.

Monsieur de Vieuxville appeared at Honour's dinner, and made himself very agreeable. No trace of the annoyance which he had allowed Gracieuse to perceive was visible to Mrs. Pemberton or her guests.

The next day came, but the expected telegram did not arrive. De Vieuxville had business in Rouen. During the short railway journey thither he determined, while in town, to telegraph both to Bristol and Glasgow. He had waited long enough for the decision of the two firms in regard to price. But the despatch was not sent.

Before he had been an hour in Rouen he learned that Antonio Pellerin had completed a contract for three years with the very houses with which he had been in negociation. He had believed the whole matter settled. On the certainty of obtaining these contracts he had counselled Mrs. Pemberton to make the outlay she had done in new machinery and other additions. Large as this outlay was,

the first year's profits would have covered it —but now? He had incurred heavy liabilities by his contracts with the farmers for planting their lands with the sugar-beet, and these must be met along with the other expenses they entailed.

He could not credit the rumour. The English and Scotch firms were noted for their uprightness. They had known that he was ready to accept their terms. Matters had gone so far that it was incomprehensible how they could have retreated from their position if they had any care to preserve their character for honourable dealing.

De Vieuxville went in search of an acquaintance who would be certain to know the truth of the report.

"Certainly Pellerin has the contracts," his friend replied, "and they are splendid. I wonder you did not go in for them. I was astonished when I found you had let both fall into the hands of Monsieur Antoine."

"One cannot undertake everything," De Vieuxville said. He had listened to this confirmation of his fears without a show of emotion. "We have work enough to employ all our resources."

Before returning home he wrote to England

for an explanation. The Bristol and Glasgow houses had united in the matter, and the transactions with De Vieuxville had been carried on through the broker of the English firm. He received an answer by return of post, business-like, even curt in its conciseness. "As Monsieur de Vieuxville had not replied to the telegram within the time which the despatch stated would be given for his ultimate decision, it had been considered a refusal on his part, and a negociation in another quarter completed."

De Vieuxville kept his own counsel, even from Mrs. Pemberton, and she—at this season much occupied with society, her schools, her poor, and a dozen other matters—took it for granted that the contract was made. She remembered afterward that she did literally take the thing for granted. Indeed, life had changed so much to her in so many ways, that when she allowed herself to think, it was almost as if she found herself (without the consciousness of transition) in another sphere.

Just then, in spite of her admiration for the prosaic side of life, Honour was in no mood to think of mere business details.

Where she trusted, Honour gave entire confidence. She was quite ready to leave everything connected with the working of affairs in

her manager's competent hands, and from the day of the *fête* he allowed her to do so in a way very unlike his habit of at first consulting her upon every point.

These were pleasant days to Mrs. Pemberton. Occupied as he was, Monsieur de Vieuxville found leisure to enter heartily into all her philanthropic projects, and to take a share of the amusements which, in her prettily tyrannical fashion, she was constantly urging him to join.

Yet he must have had enough, in many directions, to render him terribly anxious. He bore his burthen, and offered no sign. One thing was certain—he had every intention of keeping the misfortune which had befallen a secret from his employer. She had already advanced £30,000, between taking up the mortgages left at the time of her relative's death and the outlays for the enlargement of the business.

Whether or not he was an honest man, whether he meant to serve Mrs. Pemberton faithfully, or use his position to carry out certain ends of his own, De Vieuxville did a thing which few men would have done, either from a sense of honour or a belief that he should thus best further his schemes for the future. In the one case most people would have considered the act quixotic; in the other, too great a risk.

He was the possessor of 60,000 francs. Directly after the failure of the contract, he arranged matters so that he could have this money at any moment to use as a portion of the contract money would have been employed —the making good the amount consumed in the preparatory expenses. It was a sacrifice, too, far beyond the mere money loss. Armand de Vieuxville had one steady aim in life—to restore the fallen grandeur of his family, buy back the lands they had lost, and, above all, make the old feudal château secure.

These 60,000 francs had been the foundation upon which he meant to build—he deliberately gave them up. But the secrecy which he preserved and the apparent rashness with which he proceeded did not look as if he were working with a determination to save his employer from the ill effects of the first failure in his plans. It seemed rather as if he had calculated the chances, and decided that his ruling ambition could be best served by an apparent abnegation in her favour—a real sacrifice of the 60,000 francs—but made for the purpose of grasping far beyond that in the future.

Ten days after the reception of the letter from the agent of the English firms, the mystery in regard to the telegraphic despatch

was cleared up, in a very commonplace fashion, too.

De Vieuxville was superintending some changes in his room at the counting-house. A dwarf bookcase which stood near his desk was removed. Monsieur perceived an envelope which had been lying beneath it.

The instant he saw the paper something told him what it contained. He had found the missing telegram.

The despatch had undoubtedly been placed on the table with the letters. The window was open. De Vieuxville's faculty for recollecting the merest trifle came into play here — he remembered closing the casement as he entered. A puff of wind had blown the envelope under the bookcase, and it might have lain there till the day of judgment had he not been inspired with the idea of making those alterations in the arrangement of his furniture.

The whole matter was perfectly clear. There had been carelessness on the part of some one of the clerks, but not treachery—no grounds now even for accusing Monsieur Pellerin of that. Pellerin had been trying for the contract, as he had an undoubted right to do. The despatch stated distinctly that, if the terms were accepted, an answer was to be sent

within four-and-twenty hours. De Vieuxville had sent no reply—the contracts had been given to Pellerin.

It was plain enough; De Vieuxville could not even accuse himself of having missed a chance by neglecting to telegraph when the despatch did not arrive as he expected the day of the festivity. There was no one to blame except Fate: even the careless clerk who had laid the letters on the table and lied about it afterward meant to do no harm. Except for that adverse puff of wind, caused perhaps by De Vieuxville himself opening the door suddenly, the telegram would have lain in safety among his other correspondence. He still held the paper in his hand as he passed through the room where the clerks sat, and entered that appropriated to Monsieur Galais and his daughter. Gracieuse was seated at her desk—there were still certain duties she performed, quite work enough to compensate for the salary she received, but she no longer took the entire supervision of the ledgers as she had done.

"I have found the telegram," he said abruptly. "It did come on the day of the *fête*."

"Then there is no harm done," she replied.

"I have yet to learn who received it," he

continued; "the day I find out will be the signal for the clerk's expulsion."

"Has Monsieur Pellerin obtained the contracts?" she asked.

"You know he has," returned he; "but you will say nothing to your father nor any one else."

"And would they have come here if—"

"If I had received that telegram? Yes."

She shut the ledger she was at work upon; a sudden resolution showed in her face.

"I received the letters," she said. "I did not know about the telegram. I must not let one of those poor men be suspected. I was in a great hurry—I did not think."

He turned abruptly away. There was wrath in his eyes; it had passed when he looked back.

"It cannot be helped now," he said. "At least you were right to tell me. But the misfortune has cost dear—the losing those contracts is a great blow."

He left the room.

"Cost dear!" she muttered. "Oh, if he knew how much more dearly it might have cost! O my God, have mercy on me, have mercy on me!—and on him, on him!"

END OF VOL. I.

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